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AN ANSWER To a LATE BOOK INTITULED,

Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation.

In TWO PARTS.

PART I.

In which that Author's Account of the Law of Nature is conſider'd, and his Scheme is ſhewn to be inconſiſtent with Reaſon, and with it ſelf, and of ill Conſequence to the Intereſts of Virtue, and the Good of Mankind.

PART II.

In which the Authority and Uſefulneſs of the Revelation contain'd in the ſacred Writings of the Old and New Teſtament, is aſſerted and vindicated, againſt the Objections and Miſrepreſentations of that Author.

By JOHN LELAND.

DUBLIN:

Printed by S. POWELL,

For ABRAHAM BRADLEY, at the *Two Bibles* in *Dame's-ſtreet*, oppoſite to *Sycamore-Alley*, Bookſeller. M.DCC.XXXIII.

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AN ANSWER TO A LATE BOOK INTITLED, Christianity as Old as the Creation.

PART II.

In which that Author's Accounts of the Law of Nature is confuted, and his Scheme is shewn to be Inconsistent with Reason, and with it self; and of ill Consequence to the Interests of Virtue, and the Good of Mankind.

By JOHN LELAND.

Printed by J. H. for J. POWELL, for AUBREY BRADLEY, at the Three Bibles, over against Exeter-Change in the Strand, Bookseller. M.DCC.XXIII.

PREFACE.

AT a Time when ſuch bold and open Attempts are made againſt all reveal'd Religion, I think no Man ought to be blam'd for his well-meant Endeavours to defend our common Chriſtianity; and if the Reader will be ſo candid as to believe that my appearing in the preſent Controverſy proceeds from an honeſt Zeal for what I take to be the Cauſe of God and of true undefiled Religion, I ſhall not be ſollicitous to make any other Apology.

The Book to which this is an Anſwer is generally own'd to be written with great Art, and in a manner very proper to make an Impreſſion on thoſe that will not give themſelves the trouble of cloſe Thinking, which muſt be own'd to be the Character of the Generality of Readers. It has a fair Semblance of Moderation and Love to Mankind. The Author profeſſes a great Regard and Veneration for the Deity, and a Concern for his Honour in the World, and for the Intereſts of Virtue and Morality, of which he ſpeaks in very high Terms. He propoſes a Way to make the World eaſy and happy, and to deliver Men from the moſt formidable Evils, Superſtition, Prieſtcraft, and Perſecution,

ſecution, and from thoſe vain Terrors with which they are ſo apt to perplex and torment themſelves. It is under ſuch ſpecious Pretences as theſe, that he carries on his Deſign of deſtroying all reveal'd Religion, and intirely ſubverting the Authority of the Scriptures.

His Work is indeed ſufficiently confus'd; he has obſerv'd little Order or Method in it; and he frequently repeats the ſame Things; and it is probable he judg'd this Way of Writing wou'd beſt anſwer his Deſign; but it has made it a difficult Thing to give a full Anſwer to his Book. When I firſt attempted making Animadverſions upon it, I intended to follow the Author exactly, and to make diſtinct Remarks on each Chapter, according to the Order in which they are plac'd in his Book, but after I had made ſome progreſs this Way, I found it engag'd me in ſo many Repetitions, and render'd the Work ſo irregular, that I was oblig'd to alter my Method, and have now caſt this Anſwer into two Parts, in which I have endeavour'd to bring together under proper Heads, the ſeveral Things ſcatter'd in different Parts of his Book.

In the firſt Part, I conſider the Account this Author gives of the Law of Nature, and the Scheme of Religion he wou'd introduce and which he repreſents as ſo beautiful and charming and highly beneficial to Mankind, with a View to ſhew that all external Revelation is perfectly needleſs and uſeleſs. I endeavour to lay open the Inconſiſtencies of his Scheme; that it is far from deſerving the magnificent Epithets he himſelf ſo liberally beſtows upon it; that it is of pernicious

pernicious Conſequence to the Intereſts even of natural Religion taken in its juſt Extent, for which yet he profeſſes ſo great a Zeal, and to the Cauſe of Virtue in the World; and that the Advantages he propoſes may be much better obtain'd by the Aſſiſtance of external Revelation than without it.

The ſecond Part is more particularly deſign'd to obviate the Objections this Writer has advanc'd againſt the Revelation contain'd in the ſacred Writings of the Old and New Teſtament. He has not only attempted to invalidate the Proofs and Evidences on which the Authority of that Revelation is founded, and to ſhew that they are uncertain and not to be depended on, but has endeavoured to draw Arguments from the very nature of that Revelation, to prove that it is unworthy of God; that far from being of Uſe to direct the People in their Faith and Practice, it tends rather to miſlead them to wrong Apprehenſions of God and of their Duty, and to this End he has with great Art and Diligence and with equal Malice rak'd together, whatever he thought might be proper to expoſe the holy Scriptures. I have endeavour'd fairly to conſider what he offers, to obviate his Objections, and detect his Miſrepreſentations.

Several good Anſwers have been already publiſh'd; but I had drawn up the Subſtance of theſe Remarks before I read any of them except Mr. *Foſter*'s ingenious Performance; but his Method is ſo different from mine, and I take ſo much larger a Compaſs than he has done, that the View of his Book did not hinder me from

going on with my Design. I think it of no great Importance to the World to inform them why this was not publish'd sooner; if I had seen any that had consider'd the Author's Book so fully as I have done, this wou'd not have been publish'd at all. The Extent of the Design I had form'd has render'd this Answer much larger than I cou'd have wish'd. Perhaps it may be thought that I have insisted on a more particular Confutation of some Things in the Author's Book than they really deserv'd, and I confess this is my own Opinion. But as I have frequently observ'd, that Objections that seem'd to me very slight and unworthy of Notice have appear'd to others in a very different Light, I thought it wou'd be wrong to pass them by; and probably in that Case it might have been pretended, that they were left unanswer'd for another Reason than their Weakness: tho' after all I have omitted several Things that I had prepar'd, and have considerably abridg'd others for fear of being too tedious. Not to trouble the Reader with any more Excuses or Apologies, I shall only advertise him that in the following Answer I have all along quoted the Author's Book according to the first Edition in Quarto.

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THE INTRODUCTION.

AS an Introduction to the following Anſwer, I ſhall lay together ſome Obſervations on the Author's Spirit and Deſign and Manner of treating the Subject he has undertaken, and ſhall at the ſame time endeavour to ſet before the Reader a general View of the preſent Controverſy.

This Writer tells us that he has choſen to debate it in a way of Dialogue; this *being eſteem'd by the Ancients the moſt proper as well as the moſt prudent Way of expoſing prevailing Abſurdities.* I ſhall not find fault with this; every Man has a Right to chuſe that way of Writing which he thinks propereſt to anſwer the End, and which he apprehends himſelf beſt qualified

qualified for. And I own this is a very good way of Writing where the Debate is manag'd fairly and impartially, where the Dialogiſts ſtrictly preſerve their Characters, and the Arguments of the ſeveral Parties are juſtly repreſented in their full Force; ſo it is in *Cicero*'s Diologues which this Writer mentions and pretends to imitate. But where theſe Rules are not obſerv'd, no way of Writing is more fallacious, or fitter to betray the Cauſe of Truth. Becauſe a Man may make his Adverſaries, thoſe whom he has a mind to expoſe, talk as he pleaſes, and may eaſily ſtate the Arguments he thinks proper to put into their Mouths in ſuch a Manner, that he ſhall find it no difficult Matter to anſwer them.

We need go no further for an Inſtance of this, than our Author's Way of managing the Subject he has undertaken. I don't remember one Argument in behalf of Revelation clearly ſtated and repreſented in its proper Force, in his whole Book; and tho' he ſometimes puts ſomething that looks like Argument into the mouth of his pretended Chriſtian Dialogiſt B. He does it in ſuch a Manner that it is manifeſt he only introduces him as a Chriſtian the more effectually to betray and expoſe the Cauſe of Chriſtianity; he makes him often talk in a manner little agreeable to the Character of a Chriſtian, and puts ſome of the bittereſt Paragraphs in his whole Book into his Mouth. I do not complain of this meerly as a manifeſt Breach of Decorum, or of the Rules to be obſerv'd in all Writings of this kind, but as a great want of Candor, and as wilful Miſrepreſentation.

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As little can I reconcile it to that Sincerity and Candor that becomes a fair Writer and an impartial Inquirer after Truth, that at the same time that this Gentleman uses his utmost Endeavours to shew that there never was or cou'd be any external divine Revelation, and that all Pretences of this kind have been owing to Superstition, Enthusiasm, or Imposture, he yet frequently professes a great Regard for Christianity. He pretends to believe that *Christianity* is the *external* as natural Religion is the *internal Revelation of the same unchangeable Will of God*; and that *they differ only in the manner of being communicated*, p. 8. Where he speaks as if he believ'd Christianity to be a real external divine Revelation. And he proposes *greatly to advance the Honour of external Revelation, by shewing the perfect Agreement between that and internal Revelation*, ibid. He declares that he intirely agrees with Bp. *Chandler*, "That Christianity it self strip'd of the "Additions that Policy, Mistakes, and the "Circumstances of Time have made to it, is a "most holy Religion. And that true Chri-"stianity is so far from being indefensible that "it carries it's own Evidences with it; or in o-"ther Words, all it's Doctrines plainly speak "themselves to be the Will of an infinitely "wise and good God, *&c.* p. 422, 423." One wou'd be apt to think from such Passages as these, that this Author heartily believes the divine Authority of the Gospel, and only rejects the corrupt Additions that have been made to it in after Ages; but he that shou'd judge this to

be his Sentiment, wou'd form a very wrong Notion of his Deſign. By Chriſtianity which he here ſo highly commends, he does not mean what every Body elſe means by it, the whole of that Revelation that was publiſh'd by Chriſt and his Apoſtles in the Name of God, but purely and ſimply what he elſewhere calls the Religion of Nature. And in this Senſe he tells us, that "true Chriſtianity is not a Religion of Yeſter-"day, but what God at the Beginning dictated "and ſtill continues to dictate to all Men, "Chriſtians as well as others, and that it is "as Old and as Extenſive as human Nature, "*&c.* p. 4, 8." Thus, this Gentleman has found out an Expedient for intitling himſelf and his Friends to the Character of true Chriſtians, at the ſame time that they endeavour to ſubvert the Authority of the Chriſtian Revelation. And at this Rate *Julian* and *Porphyry* might have call'd themſelves true Chriſtians, whilſt they blaſphem'd *Jeſus* as an Impoſtor, and rejected his Religion as a Cheat.

It is with the ſame Spirit of Candor that our Author declares his Apprehenſions, that *for ſo laudable an Attempt as reconciling Reaſon and Revelation which have been ſo long ſet at Variance, he ſhou'd be cenſur'd as a Free-Thinker*; *but* that he is *far from being aſham'd of that Title however invidious it may ſeem*; *ſince we may as well ſuppoſe a Man can Reaſon without thinking at all, as Reaſon without thinking freely.* He adds, that *the irreconcilable Enemies of Reaſon, ſeeing it too groſs in this Reaſoning Age to attack Reaſon openly,*

penly, do it covertly under the Name of Free-thinking, p. 180. For my Part, I ſhall never be one of thoſe that ſhall cenſure this Author and thoſe of his Way as Free-thinkers. I know no People in the World that have a leſs Pretence to this Character taken in the juſt and laudable Senſe than they. No where do I ſee greater Marks of Bigotry and Prejudice. For what greater Proof of Prejudice can there be, than to reject that Evidence for Facts when brought in favour of Chriſtianity, which they themſelves wou'd think ſufficient in any other Caſe; and to admit thoſe Objections when brought againſt the Scriptures, which they wou'd reject and deſpiſe, if brought againſt any other Book in the World? it is well known that ſome of our moſt celebrated modern Free-thinkers, have taken no ſmall Pains to ſhew that there is no ſuch Thing as human Liberty, or Free-Agency, which is to leave no room for thinking or acting freely at all. There are others, who ſeem to have no other Notion of thinking freely, than thinking looſely and ſuperficially; a profane Jeſt paſſes for an Anſwer to a ſolid Argument; and it is thought a ſufficient Reaſon for rejecting an Opinion, that it is an old Opinion, that their Fathers held it, and the Prieſts teach it. This ſtrange Bigotry to Novelty and Affectation of thinking out of the common Way, is no leſs prejudicial to ſound Reaſon, and a juſt Diſcernment of Things, than the blind Bigotry to old Opinions and Practices which has ſo often been a hindrance to a fair ſearch after Truth. In oppoſition to both theſe, a juſt and gener-

ous Liberty of Thought carries a Man to judge equally, calmly, and impartially, and to conſider and weigh the Evidence with a Mind open to Conviction, and free from vicious Prejudices; and this is ſo far from being an Enemy to Chriſtianity, that it is that Diſpoſition of Mind which beſt diſpoſes a Man to embrace it.

This Gentleman indeed thinks proper to beſtow the genteel Epithet of *the irreconcilable Enemies to Reaſon* on the Advocates for Revelation. To ſhew what unreaſonable People they are, he very formally ſets himſelf in his 12th. Chapter to prove againſt them that *Men muſt uſe their Reaſon in Matters of Religion*; and that *Religion cannot oblige us not to be govern'd by Reaſon.* And he there repreſents Chriſtian Divines, as ſuppoſing that *ſome Things in Revelation are contrary to Reaſon,* and yet at the ſame Time maintaining that *they are the Will of God*, p. 179. And again, as contending that *that only is to be admitted as the Will of God which is reveal'd, tho' ever ſo inconſiſtent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reaſon of Things*; where he unfairly inſinuates that they ſuppoſe ſome Things which God has reveal'd to be inconſiſtent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reaſon of Things. This is groſs Miſrepreſentation. And what renders our Author more inexcuſable in it is, that he elſewhere takes upon him to affirm, that all Divines now agree, *that there is a Law of Reaſon which God cannot diſpence with,*

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and that no external Revelation can be true that is inconsistent with it, p. 189.

Our Author gives a Specimen of what the Advocates for Revelation may expect from him, even those of 'em for whom he pretends the greatest Esteem, in his Treatment of Dr. *Samuel Clark*, of whom he professes to be a great Admirer. The 14th Chapter of his Book is almost wholly taken up in examining the Doctor's Discourse of the *unchangeable Obligations of natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. And if he had represented the Doctor's Arguments fairly, no body wou'd have blam'd him for endeavouring to answer them. But I have scarce met with any thing more unfair or disingenuous than his whole Management on this Occasion. I have mention'd some Instances of it, as it lay in my way to vindicate some of the Arguments the Doctor had advanc'd in Defence of our common Christianity, and I cou'd easily have added more.

I never saw an Author more liberal than this Gentleman is, in the Encomiums he bestows upon his own Performance. Several of his last Pages are almost wholly taken up in a Panegyrick upon it, besides many Passages throughout his Book that look this way. This Work of his was, as I have been inform'd, the Labour of some Years, long promis'd and much boasted of before it appear'd, as well as greatly extoll'd since. But I hope it will appear from an impartial Consideration of what he has advanc'd, that Christianity has nothing to apprehend

hend from this Adverſary more than from others that have gone before him in the ſame Cauſe. It muſt be own'd that he undertakes largely. He pretends to ſhew not meerly that Revelation is not neceſſary, but that it is abſolutely uſeleſs, and cannot poſſibly be of any Advantage at all. In this he has the general Senſe of Mankind againſt him. For he himſelf tells us, that *perhaps there never was a Place or Time where ſome Revelation was not believ'd*, p. 184.

I know theſe Gentlemen have one general Way of accounting for all theſe Things, and that is, by aſcribing them to the Artifices of the Prieſts. But if Mankind had not been generally ſenſible of their Need of an extraordinary Revelation, and the Advantage this wou'd be of to them, if this had not been the Voice of Nature and Reaſon, the Prieſts wou'd not have had it in their Power to have grafted ſo much upon it. As it Reaſon had not taught Men that God is to be worſhipped, there wou'd not have been ſo many Kinds of falſe Worſhip in the World. Though therefore theſe Gentlemen ſhou'd accompliſh their Deſign (which God forbid) of baniſhing the Chriſtian Religion from theſe Nations, I don't ſee but the People wou'd be ſtill as much in danger as ever of Prieſtcraft and Impoſture, and of being led aſide by falſe Revelations, and far more ſo. For a true divine Revelation is the beſt Security againſt falſly pretended Ones; and if this were once remov'd, they wou'd be left at large to be practis'd upon by artful and deſigning Men.

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Indeed the Author can never prove what he undertakes, *viz.* that external Revelation cannot be of any Uſe or Advantage at all, except he can maintain ſuch a Sufficiency of Reaſon and Nature's Light, as to make all Aſſiſtance and Inſtruction unneceſſary. For if Inſtruction be needful, notwithſtanding the ſuppos'd Clearneſs of the Light of Nature, then external Revelation (which is an Inſtruction from God additional to that natural Light) can never be prov'd uſeleſs. And if it wou'd be an excellent Deſign in any Man that has juſt Notions of Things, to endeavour to reclaim and recover Mankind from Ignorance and Superſtition and Vice, then on Suppoſition that God ſhou'd for the Inſtruction of Mankind, and for recovering them from the Darkneſs they labour'd under, ſend ſome Perſons, and in an extraordinary Manner guide and inſpire them, that they might declare to the World in his Name what they thus receiv'd; and if he ſhou'd in an extraordinary Way interpoſe to give the moſt illuſtrious Atteſtations to their divine Miſſion, to convince the World that he ſent them, there is nothing in this but what is worthy of God, and a ſignal Inſtance of his Condeſcenſion and Goodneſs, and of great Benefit to Mankind.

Our Author is ſenſible of this, and therefore his Arguments tend to prove that Men need no Inſtruction of any kind; that all Men are naturally ſo clear-ſighted, and have ſuch a perfect Knowledge of the Whole of their Duty, and of every thing that is of Importance to them to know, that they ſtand in no need of

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any Inſtruction or Information at all; every Man is able without Difficulty to form a right Scheme of Religion for himſelf, nor can theſe Things poſſibly be made clearer to any Man by any external Means whatſoever, than they are to all Men without it. A ſtrange Hypotheſis this! and which is ſo contrary to evident Fact and Experience, and to the Obſervation of all Ages, that one wou'd wonder how any Man cou'd ſeriouſly undertake to prove it. It is a romantick Scheme, no more ſuited to Mankind than if calculated for another Order of Beings. I ſhall make no other Reflection upon it at preſent than to obſerve, that this goodly Scheme tends to prove, that all other Books written on religious or moral Subjects, the nobleſt Subjects in the World and the beſt worth writing upon, are uſeleſs as well as the Bible, and that every Man muſt be left meerly to himſelf, and to what the Author calls the pure ſimple Dictates of the Light of Nature, without any Inſtruction at all. And I think if we muſt judge from Experience, the certain Effect of this wou'd be to introduce univerſal Ignorance and Barbariſm.

The Arguments he makes uſe of to ſupport his Hypotheſis are as extraordinary as the Hypotheſis it ſelf. The Subſtance of what he offers to ſhew, that the Law of Nature is clear to all Men in its juſt Extent, amounts to this, that it is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things, that the Principles and Duties of that Law are in themſelves very reaſonable, and ſuch as right Reaſon duly exercis'd muſt approve;

prove; and he thinks this ſufficient to ſhew, that therefore they are plain and obvious to all Mankind, and what they muſt needs know and diſcern of themſelves, without any external Aſſiſtance or Information. This is the Courſe of his Reaſoning in many Parts of his Book, which depends upon this Principle, that whatever is in it ſelf true and reaſonable, founded in the Nature of Things, and capable of being prov'd, is for that Reaſon obvious and evident to all Mankind, and they can eaſily find it out of themſelves, and need no Information about it. A Principle manifeſtly falſe, and contrary to daily Obſervation and Experience, and which wou'd prove that even the moſt difficult Part of the Mathematicks, yea that the whole Compaſs of Truth is obvious and evident to all Mankind; for all Truth is agreeable to the Nature of Things, and when diſcover'd and explain'd approves it ſelf to right unprejudic'd Reaſon.

It is upon the ſame Principle that he proceeds, when he argues (as he frequently does) that if Revelation contains nothing but what is agreeable to Reaſon and to the Nature of Relations of Things, this proves that that Revelation contains nothing but what we knew before, or might as eaſily have known without that Revelation as with it; and that ſince we are to judge by our Reaſon whether a Revelation and its Doctrines be worthy of God, this ſhews that we already actually knew thoſe Doctrines antecedently to ſuch Revelation, and conſequently need no Revelation to inform us of them or

inſtruct us in them. This is the Strain of his Argument in many Places. And he asks, when he ſums up the Argument in the Concluſion of his Book, p. 424. *Are not all of my Sentiments who own that Revelation contains all Things worthy of having God for its Author?* This is very odd, that thoſe that believe the Chriſtian Revelation in all its Doctrines and Precepts to be worthy of God and a true divine Revelation, muſt for that Reaſon be of his Sentiments, who thinks there neither is nor ever was any true external divine Revelation at all. But let us hear what he adds to prove that they muſt be of his Sentiments. *For that ſuppoſes* (ſays he) *that Reaſon antecedently to Revelation can tell them what is or what is not worthy of having God for its Author.* The Meaning of the Argument is plainly this, that if upon Examination we find that Revelation appears to us to be worthy of God, and agreeable to Reaſon, this proves that we knew every thing contain'd in that Revelation before it was thus reveal'd, and that therefore it was intirely uſeleſs. A poor Fallacy, which yet runs thro' a great Part of his Book, ſince nothing is plainer than that many Things appear to us when once diſcover'd to be very juſt, and to have nothing contrary to Reaſon, which yet we ſhou'd never have found out of our ſelves without ſuch a Diſcovery. It will be eaſily own'd, that Reaſon and common Senſe is neceſſary to our judging of the Evidence of Revelation, and of the Senſe of that Revelation; but it does not follow that becauſe Reaſon and common Senſe is neceſſary

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to our understanding and judging of Revelation and of all Books whatsoever, that therefore Reason and common Sense is alone and of it self sufficient to find out whatever can be at any time discover'd to us, and that no Persons or Writings can ever inform us of any thing but what we knew or might as easily have known of our selves before. Suppose a Man shou'd take it into his Head to affirm, that Sir *Isaac Newton* had discover'd nothing in his Writings, but what all the World knew before; and shou'd prove it thus; all those must be of my Sentiments in this Matter, who maintain that his Writings contain nothing but what is agreeable to Reason, and founded in the Nature of Things; for this supposes that every Man's own Reason antecedently to his Writings was acquainted with these Things, and cou'd easily have found them out without his Information. The Argument is ridiculous, and yet it is exactly parallel to the Reasoning this Gentleman frequently makes use of, in order to shew that an external Revelation is useless, and can inform Mankind of nothing but what they actually knew, or might as easily have known before.

It is in the same Strain that this Author frequently argues, from what human Understanding absolutely speaking is capable of knowing, to what all Men actually do know, and from what right Reason when duly exercis'd and improv'd to the utmost is capable of discerning, to what is obvious to common Reason in the present State of Mankind. He often talks of

the Law of Nature's being *internally reveal'd*, in order to ſhew that any external Revelation is abſolutely uſeleſs. He carries it ſo far as to affirm, that *God cou'd not more fully make known his Will to all intelligent Beings than he has done this way*; no, though *he had miraculouſly convey'd to all Men the ſame Ideas*, p. 19, 27. And yet at other times when he comes to explain himſelf, the Meaning of all theſe magnificent Expreſſions is no more than this, that God has made Men capable of knowing the Law of Nature, or has given them Faculties which if improv'd to the utmoſt are capable of diſcerning that Law. And if every thing muſt be ſaid to be internally reveal'd to every Man which abſolutely ſpeaking he is capable of knowing, then it muſt be ſaid that the whole Compaſs of Arts and Sciences is internally reveal'd to every Man, and ſo are numberleſs Things which now we do not know, but which we have a Capacity of knowing; the Longitude is actually diſcover'd, or whenever it is found out, it may be eaſily prov'd according to this way of arguing, that it was actually reveal'd or diſcover'd long before.

Theſe kind of Reaſonings which run thro' the Author's Book, and which lie at the Foundation of all that he offers to ſhew, that an eternal Revelation is abſolutely needleſs and uſeleſs, may perhaps appear too trifling to deſerve a diſtinct Anſwer, but when we conſider the End they are deſign'd to ſerve, then theſe Trifles become ſerious, and require to be anſwer'd or at leaſt expos'd. It is indeed a tedious Employ-

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ment for an Anſwerer to go thro' a detail of ſuch Reaſonings and Inſtances, but it ought to reconcile him to it, that it may be of ſervice to the World to enter on a particular Examination of Arguments, which however triſling in themſelves may yet do Miſchief, eſpecially when plauſibly propos'd in a general way, as they uſually are by this Writer, who has the Art to ſet off very weak Reaſonings, and give them a plauſible Turn and an Air of Probability till they be cloſely examin'd.

I think it deſerves to be remark'd, that this Author himſelf more than once ſuppoſes, that it wou'd be worthy of God to ſend ſome Perſons to reclaim Mankind to the Practice and Obſervation of the Law of Nature; now if becauſe Men have undeniably fallen from the Law of Nature in their Practice, therefore it might be worthy of God to ſend Perſons to recover them to the Obſervation of that Law, then ſuppoſing Men to have fallen from the Knowledge of that Law in ſome of its important Branches and Principles, it may be worthy of God to ſend ſome Perſons to recover Men to the right Knowledge of that Law; and ſuppoſing there are ſome Things the Knowledge of which wou'd be of conſiderable Importance to our Happineſs, and to promote the Practice of Righteouſneſs, which either cou'd not be known at all, or not with a ſatisfying Certainty, without an extraordinary Revelation, it may be worthy of God to commiſſion ſome Perſons extraordinarily for that Purpoſe; and in that Caſe it wou'd be proper to give them

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ſufficient Credentials to convince the World of their divine Miſſion.

In order therefore to prove that there can be no Place, or Uſe for any extraordinary Revelation, either it muſt be ſaid, that the Bulk of Mankind are not in a State of Darkneſs and Corruption, tho' this is undeniable Fact; or that tho' they be, it is not poſſible for God, or not worthy of him to communicate his Will in an extraordinary Way to Mankind, for recovering them from that State of deplorable Ignorance and Corruption; or that ſuppoſing him to communicate his Will by extraordinary Revelation, he has no Way of giving a ſufficient Proof and Evidence to convince Mankind that he has given ſuch a Revelation. The Author attempts by turns, to prove each of theſe; tho' in each of them he has both the Reaſon of the Thing, and the common Senſe of Mankind againſt him.

If we proceed from his Reaſonings againſt Revelation in general, and take a brief View of thoſe he has advanc'd againſt the Revelation contain'd in the holy Scriptures, they will not appear to be more juſt or better founded.

If God gives any extraordinary Revelation at all to Mankind, the moſt eaſy and familiar Way, and the beſt accommodated to the Condition of Mankind ſeems to be this, that he ſhou'd ſpeak to us by Men like our ſelves. It cannot reaſonably be denied, that God may have many Ways of communicating a certain Knowledge of Things to particular Perſons to be by them communicated to others. And it is as evident

vident that thoſe Perſons that are thus extraordinarily ſent and inſpir'd of God, may communicate to others what they themſelves thus receive from God, as it is that one Man may communicate his own Sentiments and Ideas of Things to others by Speech and Language. And if the Revelation itſelf, or the Syſtem of Laws and Doctrines might be communicated by word of Mouth to the Perſons that liv'd in the Age when it was firſt given, then it was alſo capable of being committed to Writing, together with an Account of the illuſtrious Facts whereby it was originally atteſted and confirm'd; and thoſe Writings might be tranſmitted with ſuch a Meaſure of Evidence, as is ſufficient to convince any reaſonable Man, that they are the genuine Writings, and that they come to us without any ſuch material Corruption or Alteration as might deſtroy the Uſe of that Revelation. This is as evident, as it is that human Laws and Records, and the moral Inſtructions of wiſe and good Men, Philoſophers and Law-givers, may be ſo tranſmitted for the Inſtruction and Information of Poſterity; and he that ſhou'd deny this, wou'd but expoſe himſelf to the reaſonable Part of Mankind, by carrying his Scepticiſm to a ridiculous Degree. And it has been often ſhewn that we have greater Evidence for the ſafe Tranſmiſſion of the ſacred Writings to us than of any other Books in the World.

Now what Method does the Author take to invalidate this, and ſhew that the Scripture Revelation cannot be depended on? in order to prove that the Scripture is uncertain and not

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to be depended on, he has a long Harangue in his 13th. Chapter, about the uncertainty of Words and the various Meanings they are capable of. And what he offers on this Subject, if it proves any Thing, tends to prove, that no Man can be certain of the Meaning of any Book, or of any Language whatsoever; and that Words and Language are of no use at all for communicating Knowledge, yea, that they rather tend to mislead Persons from attending to the Nature of the Things themselves; for he all along thinks proper to oppose Words to Things; that consequently those that seek to improve their Knowledge by reading Books, by Conversation, *&c.* Are for being govern'd (to use the Author's Expressions) not by Things but by Words; and those only are govern'd by Things that have no Books or Instructions at all to mislead them, which is the happy Condition of the barbarous Savages. Thus in his Zeal to render the Scriptures useless, he produces Arguments which tend to prove that all Writings whatsoever, are useless too. What a strange Prejudice against Christianity is this, as if provided this were but banish'd, these Gentlemen cou'd be content that all Learning and Knowledge were banish'd along with it!

It is owing to the same strong Prejudice against the Gospel-Revelation, that in order to invalidate the Evidence whereby this Revelation it self with an Account of the principal Facts whereby it was originally attested, is transmitted to us, he advances Maxims which tend

tend to ſhew that it is impoſſible for us to be ſure of any Thing that we our ſelves did not ſee, or which we are not able to demonſtrate by Arguments drawn from the Nature of the Thing; that no Writing or Record can be depended on, that has paſs'd thro' the Hands of *fallible* and *peccable Men*, that is, that no Record at all can be depended on, ſince all Mankind muſt be own'd to be both fallible and peccable; that we cannot believe the Teſtimony of any Man in any Caſe whatſoever, except we be ſure that he is abſolutely rais'd above all the Frailties of human Nature, and incapable during the whole Courſe of his Life of ever uttering a Falſhood, or ever doing a wrong Thing on any Occaſion. Thus from an earneſt Deſire to deſtroy the Credit of the Facts, by which the Chriſtian Revelation ſtands confirm'd, and of the Conveyance whereby that Revelation is tranſmitted to us, he deſtroys the Credit of all Teſtimony and all moral Evidence. And I think it is a conſiderable Preſumption of the Strength of the Scripture-Evidence, that theſe Gentlemen cannot prove that it is not to be believ'd by any Arguments, but what wou'd equally prove that no Teſtimony at all is to be believ'd. The Man that wou'd pretend to argue thus in any other Caſe wou'd not be endur'd; and if theſe Maxims were put in Practice, they wou'd ſoon produce the utmoſt Confuſion in human Affairs, and diſſolve all Faith and Credit among Men, without which Society cannot ſubſiſt.

To the clear and poſitive Proofs that are produc'd for the Facts by which the Goſpel ſtands

atteſted and confirm'd, he oppoſes only Suſpicions of Fraud, and being not able to confront it with any Counter-Evidence, he ſuppoſes that there was ſome formerly, but that it is loſt. Thus he talks, p. 300. That *all the Hiſtorical Evidence is loſt but of one Side only.* And this is a Way of Talking that has been often us'd by the Gentlemen of that Way. But it is perfectly wild and unreaſonable. At this rate it is impoſſible ever to be convinc'd of the Truth of any Facts done in paſt Ages. For ſtill it may be ſaid, How do we know but that there was Evidence on the other ſide, but it is loſt. And if ſuch Things may be precariouſly ſuppos'd without the leaſt Proof, there will be no End of Suſpicions. But what kind of Evidence is it that they ſuppoſe was loſt, or what was that Evidence to prove? was it that there was no ſuch Perſon as Jeſus? this is not ſo much as pretended. Or was it that he wrought no Miracles? neither was this pretended by thoſe that had the beſt Opportunities to know, the firſt and eldeſt Enemies of Chriſtianity. They cou'd not deny (as appears from ſeveral Teſtimonies of theirs ſtill extant) that he perform'd ſome wonderful Works, but endeavour'd to aſcribe them to his Skill in magical Arts. Or was it to prove that he was not crucified? but this is ſo far from being denied, that the Enemies of the Goſpel have all along reproach'd Chriſtians with the infamous Death of the Author of their Religion. Or was this Evidence that is ſuppos'd to be loſt, to prove that Jeſus did not riſe again? We have ſtill remaining an Account of what the firſt Enemies of Chriſtianity

ty ſaid on this Head. They pretended, that his Diſciples feign'd his Reſurrection, and ſtole away his Body whilſt the Soldiers that were to guard it were aſleep. And if they were aſleep, how did they know the Diſciples ſtole him? But in oppoſition to this we have the poſitive Evidence of the Diſciples themſelves, who ſaw and convers'd with him after he roſe from the Dead, and confirm'd their Teſtimony with their Blood. And it is evident in fact, that their Teſtimony was ſo circumſtanc'd, and ſupported with ſuch Evidence, that it was immediately receiv'd by thouſands in the very Age in which the Fact was done, and on the Credit of it vaſt Numbers all over the World, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, believ'd in a Saviour that had been crucified, and ſubmitted to a Religion that had no worldly Advantages to recommend it, and which was abſolutely contrary to all their inveterate Prejudices, their corrupt Appetites and Paſſions, and their worldly Intereſts; which can ſcarce be ſuppos'd, if there had been then any Evidence to prove that the firſt Publiſhers of Chriſtianity were Cheats and Impoſtors, and that the Facts they appeal'd to were falſe, and publickly known to be ſo. *Celſus* indeed pretends, in a Paſſage cited by *Origen*, that he cou'd produce truer Things concerning Jeſus than what was written of him by his own Diſciples, but that he willingly paſs'd them by; ſee *Origen contra Celſ. lib. 2. p. 67. Edit. Cantab.* But we may be ſure he paſs'd them by for no other Reaſon, but becauſe he was ſenſible they were deſtitute of all Proof. And if

there was no Counter-evidence againſt the Facts of the Goſpel in *Celſus*'s Time, which was in the ſecond Century after our Saviour, or at leaſt none which that ſubtle and malicious Enemy of Chriſtianity thought proper to produce, we may well treat this ſuppos'd Counter-evidence, that is pretended to have been once extant, but to be now loſt, as a meer groundleſs Imagination.

Our modern Deiſts frequently demand, that we ſhou'd produce Evidence of the main Facts of the Goſpel from the Teſtimony of thoſe who were not Chriſtians, whom alone they will allow to be unſuſpected Witneſſes. We have Evidence, That there was ſuch a Perſon as Jeſus, who was crucified in the Reign of *Tiberius*, that he wrought wonderful Works, which his Enemies aſcrib'd to Magick, that his Diſciples were grown to a great Multitude in *Rome* it ſelf even as early as in the Days of *Nero*, that they were expos'd to grievous Sufferings and Perſecutions then and afterwards, which they endur'd with a wonderful Conſtancy, that vaſt Numbers were ingag'd by this new Religion to abandon the Heathen Temples and Ceremonies, and that they were innocent in their Lives, and bound themſelves under ſtrong Ingagements to the Practice of Righteouſneſs. Theſe Things are atteſted by Heathen Authors, as appears from the noted Teſtimonies of *Tacitus*, *Pliny*, and *Celſus*. And what cou'd be reaſonably deſir'd more? Can it be expected that Jews and Pagans ſhou'd bear witneſs to Chriſt's Reſurrection? if any one of them had declar'd

declar'd that he was convinc'd of this Fact, it wou'd undoubtedly have been pretended, that this was foiſted into his Writings, or elſe that he was a Chriſtian, and therefore not to be regarded; though I know no Reaſon why the Teſtimony of thoſe who from Jews or Pagans became Chriſtians upon the Strength of that Evidence, in oppoſition to all their former Prejudices, and thereby gave the greateſt Proof that they believ'd it and were convinc'd by it, ſhou'd be rejected. I don't ſee therefore how it wou'd have been poſſible to have ſatisfied theſe Gentlemen, if there had been further Evidence produc'd.

With regard to the Objections the Author brings againſt the Revelation it ſelf, to ſhew that it is unworthy of God, he allows himſelf ſtrange Liberties. Here notwithſtanding the fair Semblance of Moderation and Candour that he puts on, he has not been able to diſguiſe his Malice. He gives full Scope to Miſrepreſentation and Ridicule, and betrays a determin'd Reſolution to run down the Scriptures at any rate. I ſhall not enter on the Particulars here, which is ſufficiently done in the ſecond Part of the following Anſwer; but only obſerve in general, that if any Critick pretended to judge of the admir'd Writings of the Ancients by thoſe Rules which this Gentleman and his Friends ſeem to think juſt with relation to the Scriptures, he wou'd be deſpis'd by all the World, and I doubt not by theſe Gentlemen themſelves, as a froward, an impertinent, and malicious Cenſurer.

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In order to prove the Scriptures unworthy of God, he is for taking every ſingle Paſſage in the ſacred Writings in the groſſeſt literal Senſe, without making any Allowance for figurative Expreſſions at all. And at this rate the fineſt Writings in the World, and the nobleſt Paſſages in thoſe Writings, might be turn'd into Nonſenſe and Abſurdity. He turns the Faults of good Men recorded in Scripture to the Diſadvantage of the Scripture it ſelf, as if it tended to lead the People aſtray, though the impartial recording their Failures is a ſignal Proof of the Veracity and Candor of the ſacred Writers, and if they had endeavour'd to conceal or palliate thoſe Faults, it wou'd have been made a ſtronger Objection againſt them, and with more Reaſon. And when he cannot deny that the moral Precepts of Scripture (which alone are to be the Rule of our Conduct) are good and excellent, he has recourſe to ſome Actions and Caſes of an extraordinary Nature, which he ſtrips of their moſt conſiderable Circumſtances that he may the better expoſe them, though he himſelf makes the Morality of Actions depend wholly on the Circumſtances Perſons are in.

Indeed all that this Author ſeems ſollicitous about is, to heap up as many Objections as he can againſt the Scriptures, without concerning himſelf whether thoſe Objections are conſiſtent with one another, or whether they do not bear as hard upon natural Religion as upon reveal'd. Thus he frequently declaims on the great Uncertainty of what he calls traditional Religion, and the many Differences there are amongſt Chri-

Chriſtians; and yet it's certain that there are as great Differences among thoſe that have profeſs'd to be govern'd by the Law of Nature, and like this Author to fetch their Principles from the Reaſon and Nature of Things, and that even in Points of the higheſt Conſequence. And though he ſets out in his firſt Chapter with an Account of an univerſal Religion which all Mankind have acknowledg'd, and in which they have at all Times agreed, though they have been endleſly divided in poſitive Matters, and about traditional Religion; yet the contrary is evident from undeniable Fact and Experience. It cannot be denied that Mankind have very much differ'd in their Notions, even with regard to that Part of the Law of Nature that relates to the Idea of God, and the Worſhip that is due to him, the Doctrine of Providence, a future State, *&c.* which yet lie at the Foundation of all Religion. It wou'd be wrong to argue from this, that therefore thoſe Principles are in themſelves uncertain and not to be depended on. For it is no Proof that a Thing is uncertain, becauſe Men have differ'd about it; ſince there is ſcarce any thing ſo plain or certain in Nature that has not been conteſted. Yet thus it is that the Author argues againſt Revelation; though I think it ought to be obſerv'd to the Honour of it, that the main Principles of natural Religion have been no where ſo generally acknowledg'd, and ſo well underſtood, as by thoſe that have had the Advantage of an extraordinary Revelation.

There

There is nothing in his whole Book which this Gentleman declaims more pathetically upon, than the miſerable State which Chriſtian Divines ſuppoſe the Heathen World to have been in, and that God left them in a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 Years together. But is this a Difficulty peculiar to the Friends of Revelation? That the Heathens were univerſally over-run with Idolatry and Superſtition, that they continued in this State for many Ages, and conſequently that God ſuffer'd them to continue in that State is a Matter of Fact, which cannot poſſibly be denied; nor will this Author himſelf deny that this was a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption. I cannot therefore ſee upon what Foundation he can ſet up for entertaining more favourable Thoughts of the Heathens, than the Advocates for Revelation. 'Tis true, he ſuppoſes, that they ſhall not be condemn'd for not believing the Goſpel which they never heard of, and we ſay ſo as well as he. But he ſuppoſes them to have counter-acted the Law of Nature, for he plainly makes that Idolatry and Superſtition into which they had fallen to be a Defection from that original Law. The Difference between his Scheme and our's with regard to the Heathens lies here, that he ſuppoſes the Light they had to be far clearer than we think it was, and therefore leaves no room for the Plea of Ignorance, and conſequently muſt look upon their Guilt as more inexcuſable, and their Condemnation as more aggravated, in that they generally counteracted the

the Law of Nature, which according to him *no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of*. Unleſs perhaps it will be ſome Conſolation to the Gentiles, that he ſuppoſes Chriſtians, Jews, and all Mankind in all Ages, except *the free-thinking Few*, to be involv'd in the ſame Condemnation, all chargeable with perverting and corrupting the Law of Nature, and ſhutting their Eyes againſt the moſt clear univerſal Light. Theſe Things I juſt hint at here, which are more largely conſider'd in the following Anſwer.

Indeed ſome of the greateſt Difficulties in his whole Book, and which leave the largeſt Scope for Declamation, lie not ſo much againſt Scripture as againſt Providence; and therefore are what he himſelf is equally oblig'd to account for. And I have occaſion to obſerve more than once, that ſeveral of his Objections as he manages them have a very ill Aſpect on the Intereſts of natural Religion, for which yet he profeſſes ſo great a Zeal; as when he confounds God's cauſing Evil and his permitting it, and makes him the Author of the Evil he foreſees and does not prevent, when it is in his Power to do ſo. Objections which evidently lead to Atheiſm and the Denial of a Providence.

There is an Objection which this Writer has advanc'd againſt the Scripture-Revelation, which I find I have not taken notice of in the Body of the Anſwer, and therefore ſhall ſay ſomething to it here. He obſerves, that *the Scriptural and Philoſophical Accounts of natural Things ſeldom agree*, p. 209. But in

order to make any thing of this Objection, he ought first to be sure that those philosophical Accounts which he pretends disagree with Scripture are the true and certain Accounts, which perhaps he wou'd find it very hard to shew; * and then that supposing a Revelation given, it shou'd treat all Things with a philosophical Exactness, which is by no means necessary. As the proper Design of it is to be a Guide to the People in Religion and in Matters of Faith and Practice, it is sufficient if it directs them right here; and as to other Things, they are mention'd only by the Bye, and in a Manner accommodated to the Capacity of the Vulgar.

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* Even with relation to the Hypothesis he mentions, of the Sun's being immoveable, and that it is the Earth which moves, this is not absolutely and demonstrably certain, as some of the greatest Astronomers have own'd; concerning which see *Niewentyt*'s *Religious Philosopher*, Vol. 3d. Contemplat. 29. Sect. 5. *& seq*; The other Instance this Author produces is, that our Saviour and St. *Paul* suppose that the Grain of Corn must die in the Ground before it fructifies, *John* 12. 24. 1 *Cor*. 15. 36. and so it must. The Body or outward Part of the Grain must rot and be dissolv'd in the Ground (and this is all that is to be understood by its dying) or it will not rise and yield Fruit. And the Propriety and Beauty of the Comparison, as us'd by our Saviour and St. *Paul*, might be easily shewn. And if this Writer had not a strange Desire to find fault with the Scripture, he wou'd never have produc'd this Instance as he there does, as alone sufficient to invalidate the Authority of the Whole.

But

But he asks, " Is there no Difference between " God's not contradicting vulgar Notions, and " confirming them by ſpeaking according to " them? Can the God of Truth need Error " to ſupport his Truth? p. 208." But I deny that to ſpeak according to vulgar Notions in ſuch a Caſe, is to confirm them. It is only to let them alone. He that ſpeaks in an hiſtorical or moral Diſcourſe of the Sun's Motion, which is an Inſtance the Author mentions to ſhew that the Scripture is contrary to the Nature of Things, neither confirms nor confutes the vulgar Notion; and indeed does not meddle with it at all, but only uſes a way of ſpeaking that is common, and to uſe any other in ſuch a Caſe under Pretence of ſpeaking with more of a philoſophical Exactneſs, wou'd be a ridiculous Affectation; it wou'd be only to ſet the Vulgar a ſtaring, and to turn them from the Point in View to Things that did not concern them, and of which they were not proper Judges. It is not fit that a Revelation ſhou'd enter into philoſophical Controverſies, except the Deſign of it were to ſet Men right in theſe, which it was never intended to do. The Author further asks, " Is " there no Difference between God's not a- " mending Men's Logick and Rhetorick where " it is defective, and uſing ſuch himſelf? " Here he ſuppoſes that a Revelation ought to have the moſt perfect Degree of Logick and Rhetorick. But how will he prove this to be neceſſary or proper in a Revelation deſign'd for the Uſe of the Vulgar? I am perſuaded the

Scripture is much more uſeful, and far better fitted to anſwer the Deſign, than if it had been written in a Method which ſome wou'd think more ſtrictly logical and artificial. Beſides if God makes uſe of Men at all as his Inſtruments in conveying a Revelation to Mankind, may he not be ſuppos'd in many Caſes to leave the Writers pretty much to their own Manner of Expreſſion, only taking care to guide them infallibly, ſo as to keep them from Error in what they deliver as his Will?

No inconſiderable Part of the Author's Book is taken up in inveighing againſt the Superſtitions, the Follies and Corruptions that have been introduc'd among thoſe that have profeſs'd the Chriſtian Name; he thinks he has *ſhewn ſome Reſolution in daring to attack the darling Weakneſſes and Follies of falſe Chriſtians*, p. 422. And if he had done this with a View to recover Men to the true Spirit of Chriſtianity, and to the original Purity and Simplicity of the Goſpel of Jeſus, he might have done ſervice to Religion and Mankind, and we ſhou'd not have grudg'd him ſome of thoſe Encomiums he ſo liberally beſtows upon himſelf; but nothing can be more diſingenuous, than to argue from the corrupt Alterations and Additions that have been made to the Chriſtian Religion againſt the original Revelation it ſelf, as contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, as if it were accountable for all the Abuſes that have been made of it; which yet is his evident Deſign. The ſame way of arguing

arguing wou'd equally hold for diſcarding all Religion and Worſhip of the Deity. This Gentleman thinks fit to obſerve, that *thoſe Animals whom we deſpiſe for want of Religion*, yet are happier than Mankind, and excel them in a ſocial Conduct, p. 165. And if this wou'd prove that Men had better be without Religion, it wou'd equally ſhew they had better be without Reaſon too, and without Liberty; for I don't know any thing that has been more perverted and abus'd.

Another Piece of Management familiar to this Author and others of our modern Deiſts, is this; if they can but meet with an incautious Paſſage in any Chriſtian Writer, this is immediately turn'd to the Diſadvantage of the common Cauſe, and perhaps is improv'd into a general Conſent, and repreſented as the common Sentiment of the whole Chriſtian Church. I ſhall mention one Inſtance of it which now occurs to me, and which I have not taken notice of in the following Anſwer. In p. 255. he quotes a raſh Paſſage out of one of *Origen*'s Homilies, in which he ſpeaks in a very degrading Manner of the Law of *Moſes* taken in the literal Senſe, and in the common Acceptation of the Words, as if it were not ſo reaſonable as the Laws of other Nations. And he thinks fit to introduce it thus, that *Origen, by virtue of his allegorical Method, was eſteem'd the greateſt Champion of Chriſtianity next to the Apoſtles; and ſince what he ſays was not only his own Senſe, but the Senſe of the Chriſtian Church,*

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it will not be improper to cite him. Can any thing be more unfair? Muſt all *Origen's* Reveries (and no Man in that Age had more) paſs for the Senſe of the univerſal Church, and all becauſe he writ an Apology for Chriſtianity? Every body knows indeed that *Origen* was very fond of Allegory, (though he himſelf owns, that the Generality of Chriſtians underſtood the Scriptures in the literal Senſe and common Meaning of the Words*) but it was not by virtue of his allegorick Method that he prov'd an able Champion for Chriſtianity. In his celebrated Work againſt *Celſus*, he meddles but little with Allegories, and defends the literal Senſe of the Doctrines and Facts of the Goſpel in a ſolid Manner. And if we muſt judge of his Senſe from that Apology, which was the matureſt and beſt conſider'd of all his Works, he there frequently gives the moſt advantageous Account of *Moſes* and his Law; and mentioning ſome of its Conſtitutions even literally taken, praiſes them as manifeſting an admirable Wiſdom, far ſuperior to the Laws of other Nations; ſee *Origen contra Celſum, lib. 5. p.* 259, 260. Though it will be eaſily own'd, that many Things in *Moſes's* Law had a further Reference, as Types and Prefigurations of good Things to come; and to conſider them in this Light, gives us a ſtill more comprehen-

* See Bp. *St. David's* Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles, *Part* I. *p.* 100.

ſive

ſive View of the Wiſdom of the divine Author.

It is an uſual Artifice with this Writer when he has a mind to expoſe a Thing, to call it by a hard Name, and repreſent it under a diſagreeable Idea, and then he argues againſt it as under that Idea. Thus the whole Strength of what he ſays againſt poſitive Precepts, which makes a conſiderable Part of his Book, ariſes only from the Idea of *Arbitrary* which he is pleas'd to affix to thoſe Precepts, and by *Arbitrary*, he means Things for which there is no Reaſon at all. As if poſitive Precepts and unreaſonable Ones were the ſame Thing, which is fairly to beg the very Point in Queſtion, ſince he cannot but know, that thoſe that maintain that there are poſitive Precepts do alſo maintain that there were good Reaſons for injoining them. On this Foundation it is, that he pretends, that thoſe that think God can act arbitrarily, or give arbitrary Commands, can have no Certainty that he will keep his Word, or do as he ſays; ſince if he acts arbitrarily in one Inſtance, he may do ſo in all; and yet without being aſſur'd of this, no Revelation can be relied on, nor conſequently be of any Uſe. This is the Courſe of his Reaſoning, p. 246. and elſewhere. And if by acting arbitrarily were meant acting unreaſonably and unjuſtly, it may be ſaid that if God can act unjuſtly, or if he can at his own Pleaſure lie and deceive in one Inſtance, he can do ſo in more, and we can never depend upon any Thing he ſays or does: But if by God's

God's acting arbitrarily and giving arbitrary Commands, he means only giving positive Precepts, or injoining Things which tho' abstractly and in general they are indifferent, yet as Things are circumstanc'd he has wise Reasons for injoining, and which consider'd and us'd as he requires them, are subservient to the Practice of Things in themselves Good and Excellent, and may answer several valuable Purposes, which is the true Notion of positive Precepts, I see no manner of Connexion between these two Ideas, God's instituting positive Precepts, and his not keeping his Word, or why it shou'd be concluded, that if he can do the one, he can do the other too.

As another Instance of this Kind I might observe, that in his 12th. Chapter he makes a long Declamation against implicit Faith, and against a renouncing or giving up our Reason. This looks plausible, for implicit Faith and the giving up our Reason has a bad Sound. But when we examine what he means by implicit Faith, it is not meerly a depending blindly upon Authority, without examining into the Grounds of that Authority, or a believing absolute Impossibilities and Contradictions upon any pretended Authority whatsoever: But he represents all believing upon any Authority at all, let the Authority be never so well founded, under that disagreeable Idea, and argues against it under that Notion. And yet by the universal Consent of all Nations, Authority or Testimony is in many Cases a good Reason for believing a Thing, and in some Cases is the only Proof the Thing admits of.

I think there can ſcarce be a more manifeſt Proof of the Prejudice and Partiality of this Author than that, tho' he will not allow that any external Revelation from God can be of any Uſe at all, yet he frequently profeſſes his high Eſteem and Admiration for the Philoſophers, and thinks their Writings may be of ſignal Uſe. When he is ſpeaking of the firſt Publiſhers of the Chriſtian Revelation, he acts the Part of a rigid Cenſurer, and ſeems induſtrious to ſeek for Faults, but when he has occaſion to mention any Thing Blame-worthy in the Conduct of the Philoſophers, ſuch as their mean countenancing the Superſtition of their Country, then he is all Tenderneſs and Candor. It was *prudent* in them *to uſe ſome ſoftning Expreſſions*; and the only Reflection that ought to be made upon it is, *how abſurd it is to argue from what even the beſt of Men ſay, when it is not ſafe to talk otherwiſe.* Inſtead of finding Fault with 'em, we ought rather to own that we *are infinitely oblig'd to 'em for writing ſo freely as they have done conſidering the Diſadvantages they were under*, ſee p. 396, 397. Let us allow this Gentleman to make what Excuſes he pleaſes in favour of the Philoſophers; but there is one important Reflexion that here naturally offers it ſelf, and that is, how unfit thoſe Philoſophers were to reform Mankind who wou'd run no Hazard to do it, who from a mean Cowardice, and for fear of expoſing themſelves to any Inconvenience, inſtead of declaring openly againſt that Superſtition and Idolatry which according to the Author they deſpiſed

ſpiſed in their Hearts, not only complied with it themſelves, but adviſed others to do ſo too! And if as he expreſſes it, we are infinitely oblig'd to the Philoſophers for writing ſo freely as they have done under ſuch Diſadvantages, how much more are we oblig'd to the Apoſtles and firſt Preachers of Chriſtianity who at the hazard of their Lives, and all that is dear to Men, and in Oppoſition to the greateſt Dangers and Difficulties, undertook the glorious Work of reſcuing Mankind from the inveterate Superſtition and Idolatry in which they had been ſo long involv'd, and from their amazing Corruption and Diſſoluteneſs of Manners, to the right Knowledge and Worſhip of the only true God, and to the Practice of univerſal Purity and Righteouſneſs?

I am ſenſible that thoſe of our Author's Complexion, will impute that divine Fortitude, that Contempt of the World, and of Death it ſelf, which was ſo eminent in the Apoſtles and primitive Chriſtians, to a Spirit of Enthuſiaſm; and they may if they pleaſe, honour all the noble Emotions of Spirit that have produc'd the moſt wonderful Actions with that Name; but the beſtowing this Name upon them, will not hinder them from deſerving our Admiration, eſpecially when we conſider the Principles from which they flow'd, an ardent Zeal for the glory of God, and a hearty Benevolence towards Mankind. And to a Mind that judges equally and impartially of true Merit, and is not carried away with a falſe blaze of Glory, they will appear to have far better

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deſerv'd the Character of *Benefactors to Mankind*, than thoſe *Heroes* form'd by the Education under the Philoſopher, whom he honours with that glorious Title, and of whom he ſpeaks with Rapture, as Men whom, as a noble Author expreſſes it, *we are ſcarce worthy to mention*, and *cannot hope to imitate*, p. 168.

Indeed as far as appears, our modern pretended Patrons of natural Religion, and declar'd Enemies of all Superſtition, wou'd be well enough pleas'd to ſee the old *Pagan* Superſtitions reſtor'd, provided Chriſtianity were aboliſh'd. Our Author repreſents from *Plutarch the Religion of the Heathen Church*, (as he calls it) *as full of Satisfaction, Hope, Joy, and Delight*, p. 77. He often mentions *the univerſal Liberty that was allow'd among the Ancients*; that (as a noble Writer has it) *Matters were then ſo ballanc'd, that Reaſon had fair play; Learning and Science flouriſh'd; wonderful was the Harmony and Temper that aroſe from theſe Contrarities*, p. 101. But I cannot well reconcile theſe magnificent Accounts of the Liberty that flouriſh'd among the Ancients, with the Excuſe he makes for the Philoſophers, that if they ſeem'd to countenance the Superſtitions of their Country, it was becauſe *it was not ſafe to talk otherwiſe*; that they were oblig'd to *uſe ſoftening Expreſſions*; and that therefore they *writ under great Diſadvantages*.

Theſe Gentlemen ſeem to me to have form'd a romantick Idea of the Virtue and Felicity of ancient *Greece* and *Rome*, little agreeable to

Fact or Hiſtory. What *Greece* was in the eldeſt Times *Thucydides* informs us, when Theft and Rapine was counted honourable and glorious; and afterwards in the politer Ages of *Greece*, when Arts and Eloquence flouriſh'd, if we judge of them even by the Accounts given by their own Hiſtorians, we ſhall have a very indifferent Opinion of their Virtue. They had indeed ſome great Men amongſt them, who were generally ill us'd; and how much there was of a philoſophical Liberty allow'd even in *Athens*, the moſt learned and polite of the *Grecian* Republicks, *Socrates* is an Inſtance. As to the *Romans*, if we conſider them in the more polite and ſplendid Times of the Republick, when Arts and Learning flouriſh'd amongſt them, we ſhall find that the Age that produc'd a *Cato*, a *Cicero*, and a *Brutus*, when Philoſophy was at its Height in *Rome*, was corrupt and diſſolute to a Degree that can ſcarce be imagin'd. Or if we aſcend to the elder Times of the Republick, their Hiſtory is little elſe than a conſtant Succeſſion of Wars abroad for extending their Dominion and Conqueſts, and perpetual Struggles and Contentions at home. The Patricians and great Men that compos'd the Senate, thoſe fierce and zealous Republicans that make ſo glorious a Figure in Hiſtory, were ever for oppreſſing the poor Plebeians. The Body of the People in thoſe celebrated happy Times were rude and ignorant to a great Degree, ſunk in an Idolatry and Superſtition, than which nothing cou'd be more groſs and ſtupid; and if they were generally free from

from thoſe Vices that Effeminacy and Luxury are apt to introduce, it is not to be wonder'd at, ſince they were for a long Time poor, and exercis'd with continual Wars. Their Virtue was rough and ſavage; they made Glory conſiſt chiefly in military Bravery; their very Diverſions breath'd a Fierceneſs ſcarce conſiſtent with Humanity; how barbarous were their publick Sports, feaſting their Eyes in ſhedding human Blood? What were all their Triumphs but an inhuman inſulting over thoſe who were ſo unhappy as to fall Victims to their Pride and Ambition and Luſt of Power? Their admir'd Patriotiſm and Love to their Country was for the moſt part only a ſtrong Paſſion for what they call'd their Country's Glory, that is, for rendring it the Miſtreſs of all others, and the only one to which other States ſhou'd pay Homage. And this Paſſion the ſtronger it was, the more miſchievous it render'd them to their Neighbours. Impatient as they were of any Tyrant at home, they themſelves were for lording it over all others, jealous of any that did but preſerve themſelves in a State of Liberty and Independency upon them, which they were too proud and haughty to endure long. Notwithſtanding all the glorious Repreſentations theſe Gentlemen delight to make of the Virtue and Felicity of thoſe Times, our own are far happier, if we be but duly ſenſible of our Happineſs. We enjoy more of the Sweets of a juſt and extenſive Liberty; nor need we go out of the Hiſtory of theſe Nations for Inſtances of true Patriotiſm, equal to any in

Greece

Greece and *Rome*. And as the Chriſtian Virtue is of the nobleſt Nature, comprehending Piety towards God free from Superſtition and Idolatry, an extenſive Benevolence towards Mankind, and an univerſal Purity of Heart and Life, ſo I doubt not that even in our preſent Corruption which this Writer ſo much exaggerates, there are many Inſtances of a pure and ſublime Virtue in its juſt Extent, far tranſcending what was to be found in ancient Pagan *Rome* even in its happieſt Times. Beſides that the Body of the People are incomparably more knowing, and have far juſter Notions of God and of their Duty, and of whatſoever is of the greateſt Importance to Mankind to know.

The ſame Reflections may be applied to other Inſtances produc'd by the Author. He repreſents *the Infidels of China* (as he expreſſes it) as *having the Preference to Chriſtians in relation to all moral Virtues*, p. 404, 405. and tells us from Mr. *Libnitz*, that "ſuch is "our growing Corruption, that it may almoſt "ſeem neceſſary to ſend ſome *Chineſe* Miſſion-"aries to teach us the Uſe and Practice of na-"tural Theology; as we ſend Miſſionaries to "them to teach them reveal'd Religion." But certainly we need not be ſent to the Writings of *Confucius* to learn Morals, which we may much better learn from the Goſpel, and which are there inforc'd with far greater Authority, and urg'd with infinitely ſtronger Motives. Shall the Literati in *China*, many of whom deny a Providence and a future State, be ſent to inſtruct us in natural Theology? Or thoſe who worſhip

Idols

Idols be ſent to teach us the true Worſhip of the Deity? Nor need we their Inſtructions as to the Duties and Offices of the civil and ſocial Life. For not to mention the inhuman Practice ſo prevalent among them, of expoſing and deſtroying their Infants, I think all Authors are agreed that there is not a Nation upon the Face of the Earth more addicted to cheating and defrauding, or that have a leſs Regard to Truth and Honeſty in their Dealings than they have. And whatever is ſaid of their brotherly Affection and Benevolence, Prejudice it ſelf muſt own, that it is impoſſible to carry this to a greater Height than the Goſpel does; and that univerſal Love and Charity, even towards our Enemies themſelves, is there recommended and inforc'd in the ſtrongeſt and moſt ingaging Manner. We need not therefore any Miſſionaries from *China* to teach us Morals. The moſt effectual Remedy againſt our growing Corruption, wou'd be to procure a greater Veneration for the holy Scriptures, to ſtrengthen Men's Belief and promote the Knowledge and Study of them, and to ingage Men to pay a greater Regard to the excellent Laws and Doctrines of the Goſpel. And I cannot but think thoſe Gentlemen very ill employ'd, who whilſt they complain of the great Corruption of the Age, do all they can to deſtroy the Authority of the Chriſtian Revelation, which where it is heartily believ'd and ſubmitted to, is the moſt effectual Remedy againſt it.

I ſhall take this Occaſion to make a brief Repreſentation of the admirable Tendency there is in the holy Scriptures to promote the Practice

tice of pure and refin'd Morality in its juſt Extent, which may both juſtly recommend thoſe ſacred Writings to our Eſteem, and let us ſee the Obligations we are under to thoſe who take ſo much pains to vilify and expoſe them.

Any one that impartially conſiders and compares the Old and New Teſtament, will find one uniform Deſign carried on thro' the Whole; which is to ingage Men to the Love, the Service and Adoration of the Deity, and the Practice of univerſal Righteouſneſs, to deter them from Vice and Wickedneſs and Idolatry, in a Word, to recover the human Nature to true and ſolid Happineſs.

This Author gives a Definition of true Religion or religious Truth, that "it muſt conſiſt "in the Agreement of our Ideas with thoſe "Things which are the Subjects of our reli-"gious Inquiry, *viz.* the Nature of God and "Man; and falſe Religion muſt conſiſt in ha-"ving Ideas that are not agreeable to, or do "not truly repreſent thoſe Subjects, p. 68. This Character of religious Truth agrees admirably well with the holy Scriptures. If we conſider the Idea of God given us in the Old Teſtament and in the New, nothing can have a greater Tendency to form our Minds to becoming Affections and Diſpoſitions towards him. We have there the moſt glorious and lively Deſcriptions of his Almighty Power, his immenſe Greatneſs, his unſearcheable Wiſdom, and eſpecially his boundleſs Goodneſs and Love. His Providence is there every where repreſented as moſt wiſely and powerfully governing all E-

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vents, the Affairs of Nations, and particular Perſons. His Ways are repreſented as ſometimes dark and myſterious, but always moſt wiſe and righteous; his Dominion and Sovereignty as abſolute and unlimited, and yet as ever proceeding by the ſteddy Rules of infinite Wiſdom, Goodneſs and Righteouſneſs. In his Idea, as repreſented in Scripture, are united the moſt exalted Majeſty and Dignity, and the moſt marvellous Grace and Condeſcenſion; his Goodneſs as there deſcrib'd is not a weak ſoft Indulgence, which will not ſuffer him to vindicate the Authority of his Laws, (which is the Notion our Author ſeems to entertain of it, but which is a Character unbecoming the wiſe Governor of the World) but a moſt juſt Goodneſs, directed in all its Effects by infinite Wiſdom, and in a perfect Conjunction with infinite Purity; ſhewing Mercy to penitent returning Sinners, without giving any Encouragement to the Obſtinate and Preſumptuous. The Method of our Redemption makes ſuch a Diſplay of the divine Excellencies in their Harmony, eſpecially his impartial Juſtice and his incomprehenſible Grace and Mercy, as repreſents him at once moſt amiable and venerable.

If we proceed from the Idea of God to that of Man, as repreſented in thoſe holy Writings, this is not leſs remarkable. The original Dignity of the human Nature is there aſſerted, and its preſent Corruption and Degeneracy (which is too ſadly confirm'd by Experience and Obſervation) deſcrib'd in the moſt affecting Manner. Man is made ſenſible of his Miſeries, his Wants

and Diſeaſes, the Fruits of his Apoſtacy from God, not to drive him into Deſpair, but to make him ſollicitous for a Cure; and this he is directed to look for, not meerly in himſelf, but in God the kind Parent of his Being; he has deſtroy'd himſelf, but in God is his Help and his Salvation.

If we conſider the moral Precepts both in the New Teſtament and in the Old, they are unqueſtionably pure and excellent. Our Duty is there ſet before us in its juſt Extent, with reſpect to God, our Neighbours, and our ſelves. With reſpect to God a pure Adoration of the Deity is every where preſcrib'd, an ardent Love to God and thankful Admiration of his infinite Goodneſs, a ſteddy Affiance in his Grace and Mercy, join'd with a profound Veneration of his Holineſs and Juſtice; an intire Reſignation to his Will, a conſtant Dependence on his Providence. We are requir'd to pray to him for all the Mercies we ſtand in need of, and to bleſs him for all the Benefits we enjoy, and to obſerve the Rites he himſelf hath appointed, which in the New Teſtament are few and ſimple, and though in the Old they were more various and difficult of Obſervation. beſides that they were wiſely fitted for the Time then preſent, great Care is there taken to inſtruct the People, that theſe wou'd be of no avail to recommend them to the Favour of God, without the Practice of univerſal Righteouſneſs.

With reſpect to the Duties we owe to our Fellow-Creatures, all Injuſtice and Oppreſſion, Fraud and Unrighteouſneſs, all Hatred, Malice and

and Revenge is forbidden in the ſtrongeſt Manner both in the Old Teſtament and the New; the Exerciſe of Juſtice and Righteouſneſs and Fidelity, of mutual Benevolence and Kindneſs and Charity, is there recommended and inforc'd in the ſtrongeſt Manner, but eſpecially in the Goſpel of Jeſus, which undeniably breaths univerſal Love and Benevolence in every Part of it, and this in its utmoſt Extent, as reaching to the whole human Race; not excepting our Enemies themſelves, and thoſe that have injur'd us.

With reſpect to our ſelves, it every where preſcribes an univerſal Purity, Chaſtity, and Temperance; it teaches us to govern our Affections, and to raiſe them to the Things that are above. It is not meerly an outward Sobriety and Regularity of Deportment that is requir'd in the Old Teſtament and in the New, but an inward Purity and Sanctity of Soul. But tho' the Morality of the Scripture is ſo pure and ſublime, and of ſo great an Extent, yet this is without running into any wild and extravagant Exceſſes, unſuited to the Condition of the human Nature. We are there taught to govern and ſubdue our corrupt Appetites and Paſſions, but not to eradicate them, according to the vain-glorious Rant of the *Stoicks*. It does not under Pretence of an extraordinary Purity forbid and condemn innocent Enjoyments. The Mortification requir'd in the Old Teſtament and in the New is not cruelly to wound and macerate our Bodies, but to mortify our Pride and Senſuality, and our beloved Luſts. It is a mild a human and ſociable Virtue that it preſcribes, not unreaſonably auſtere.

ſtere. The Fortitude it requires is a Firmneſs of Soul rais'd above all the Terrors of this World, yet not a rigid Apathy, inſenſible to Pain or the Movements of Pity, but tender, human, and compaſſionate. Our Author, p. 89. finds fault with ſome of the primitive Chriſtians for their Forwardneſs in offering themſelves to Suffering and Death, (a glorious Fault which in others probably wou'd have been admir'd) but the Goſpel which admirably guards againſt all Extremes, is not chargeable with this. A prudent Circumſpection in avoiding Dangers is there not only allow'd but preſcrib'd, *Mat.* 10. 16, 22. We are not to ſeek Death, tho' not to fear it in a good Cauſe.

But what deſerves ſpecial Notice with reſpect to the Morals requir'd in the Goſpel is that at the ſame time, that it requires ſuch an eminent Purity and univerſal Righteouſneſs, it tends to promote an amiable Humility. The Virtue it requires is not Vain-glorious, Proud and Aſſuming. How different is the Idea and Character of a good Man form'd upon the Model of the Scriptures from the wiſe Man of the Stoicks, ſetting up for a kind of Divinity and Self-ſufficiency in himſelf! We are taught in the Scriptures, to aſpire to the higheſt Degree of Purity, and yet when we have done all, to diſclaim all Confidence in ourſelves; to abound in good Works but not to glory in them; to uſe our utmoſt Diligence, and yet place our Dependance on God for his divine Aſſiſtances, and aſcribe to him the praiſe of every good Thing that is in us. The Chriſtian Virtue refers all to God, as

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the glorious Fountain and Author of all Good, to him ever directs its Views, lives in a conſtant Dependance on him, and ſubſiſts by Communications from him. It lives to him here and looks for the immediate Viſion and eternal Enjoyment of him in a future State. What a perfect finiſh'd Character, what a lovely Form of Goodneſs is this?

Thoſe ſacred Writings not only ſet our Duty before us in its juſt Extent, but abound with the moſt excellent Motives and Arguments to engage us to the Practice of it. Nothing can poſſibly be more moving and pathetical, than the Exhortations that are there made in the Name of God himſelf. He is there repreſented as expoſtulating with Sinners concerning their Folly and Diſobedience; as commanding with the Authority of a God, beſeeching them with the Tenderneſs of a Father; the moſt awful Threatnings are denounc'd on the one Hand, the moſt inviting Promiſes are made on the other. Sin is repreſented in all its Malignity and Demerit, and God's Diſpleaſure againſt it deſcrib'd in ſuch a Manner, as is moſt apt to ſtrike Sinners with a Terror of his Juſtice; and at the ſame time, all poſſible Encouragement is given to penitent returning Sinners. They are not meerly left to their own uncertain Conjectures, but they have the ſtrongeſt Aſſurances given them in the Name of God himſelf, that if they repent and turn from their evil Ways, he will forgive their Iniquities, how many and aggravated ſoever, and will confer the moſt glorious Benefits upon them. To excite and animate us in the Practice

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of our Duty, the moſt perfect and lovely Pattern of univerſal Goodneſs and Righteouſneſs is exhibited to our View in the Example of the Son of God himſelf in our Nature; our Duty is urg'd upon us by all the happy Conſtraints of Love and Gratitude; good Men are repreſented as inveſted with the moſt glorious Priviledges; the Influences and Aids of the divine Spirit are promiſed; and finally the Goſpel contains the moſt expreſs Promiſes of the glorious Reward of eternal Life, with which God will in his rich Grace and Goodneſs crown our ſincere perſevering Obedience.

Our Author indeed by a ſtrange way of Reaſoning, endeavours to turn this to the Diſadvantage of the Goſpel-Revelation. He obſerves, that "if Men are apt to embrace any Religion "(the *Mahometan* for Inſtance) which flatters "their Hopes of future Felicity, and makes "them loth to diſcover the pleaſing Illuſion, "does it not follow that the more any Religion "does ſo, the more Cauſe Men have critically "to examine into it's Reaſonableneſs, p. 220." As if the promiſing eternal Life as the Reward of Virtue and Goodneſs were a ſuſpicious Character, and enough to make us doubt whether a Revelation came from God. Indeed if the Happineſs it propos'd were like a *Mahometan* Paradiſe, low, baſe, and ſenſual, conſiſting in the Gratification of the fleſhly Appetites, this might adminiſter juſt Cauſe of Suſpicion. But the Idea the Goſpel gives us of that future Felicity, is the nobleſt that can be conceiv'd. It repreſents it as a State of conſummate Purity, con-

consisting in the eternal Enjoyment of God himself, and in a perfect Conformity to him. And to propose such a pure and sublime Happiness as this, and to assure us by an express Promise from God himself that this shall be the glorious Reward of our sincere tho' imperfect Obedience is a signal Advantage to the Cause of Virtue in the World, and one of the noblest Purposes for which we cou'd suppose a Revelation given. And to take away this, wou'd be to deprive Virtue of its strongest Encouragements and supports, and to rob good Men of that which is the most glorious Source of their Consolation, and the most effectual Support against all the Evils and Sufferings to which they are now expos'd.

The Gospel also denounces the most awful Punishment against those that persist in an impenitent presumptuous Course of Sin and Disobedience, and this is no less necessary in a Revelation given from God than the Promises made to the Righteous. There are many that are wholly immers'd in Vice and Sensuality; it is vain to talk to such of the Beauty of Virtue; they are insensible of its Charms, and have no Taste for its pure and refined Pleasures. The Voice of Reason is not heard amidst the Tumult of the Passions, and headstrong Appetites. To such obstinate Sinners Hell is opened, and the dreadful Threatnings of eternal Misery are thundred in their Ears, not to drive them to Despair but to deter them from their evil Courses. And nothing can have a more apt Tendency to awaken them to a serious Consi-

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deration of their Guilt and Danger, and ſuch a Conſideration is often the firſt Step to Repentance and Amendment, and prepares the Way for better Impreſſions.

I think it appears upon this brief Repreſentation, that ſuppoſing a divine Revelation really given to Mankind, it cou'd ſcarce be expected to exhibit a more lovely and perfect Form of Goodneſs, more pure and excellent Precepts, or Doctrines that have a happier Tendency to form in us the moſt noble and excellent Diſpoſitions; nor cou'd it be ſuppos'd to ſet before us more powerful Motives to engage us to univerſal Righteouſneſs, or to deter us from the Practice of Vice and Wickedneſs; ſo that we may ſafely pronounce it worthy of God: and if it contains ſome Doctrines of a ſublime and myſterious Nature, (and ſuch Things there are even in natural Religion it ſelf) this is what may be juſtly expected in a Revelation deſign'd amongſt other Things to inform us of the Nature, and the wonderful Councils of the Deity, Things very remote from our Apprehenſion. And yet there is no Doctrine taught in the Scriptures that is deſign'd meerly to entertain and amuſe us, but to excite good Affections in us, and to have a noble Influence on the Practice.

And ſhall we then regard thoſe as Friends and Benefactors to Mankind, who labour with ſo much Art and Induſtry to ſubvert the Authority of ſuch a Religion as this, ſo pure and excellent in its Nature and Tendency? it is hard to conceive what real Benefit or Advantage to Mankind ſuch Perſons can propoſe by their

their Attempt. Do they propoſe to advance the Cauſe of Virtue by taking away its ſtrongeſt Encouragements and Supports, or to reclaim the World from Vice by removing the Reſtraints Chriſtianity lays upon it? Do they propoſe to render the Lives of good Men more comfortable and happy? Or to give 'em greater Aſſurances of the divine Favour and Acceptance than the Goſpel does, or raiſe 'em to more lively Hopes of a glorious Immortality? Far from this, they endeavour to raviſh from them that which is the chief Comfort and Satisfaction of their Lives, and leave them to endleſs perplexing Uncertainties. Or do they propoſe by aboliſhing Chriſtianity to deliver Men from vain and needleſs Terrors? But whom do they propoſe to deliver from their Fears? Not the truly penitent and ſincere, for the Goſpel ſpeaks no Terror to ſuch; it makes the moſt effectual Proviſion for their Comfort, aſſuring them of the Favour of God, of the Aſſiſtances of his Spirit, and of the moſt glorious eternal Rewards.

They can only therefore propoſe to free the vicious Part of Mankind, thoſe that perſiſt in an obſtinate Courſe of Wickedneſs, from the Terrors they are under of a future Puniſhment. The Goſpel does indeed denounce the moſt awful Threatnings againſt ſuch Perſons. And is it not highly proper and uſeful that ſuch ſhou'd be in Terror? And he that ſhou'd attempt to ſet them free from thoſe Fears, wou'd be far from doing Service to Mankind, or to the Cauſe of Virtue in the World. Yet this ſeems to be the Deſign theſe Gentlemen have in view. As they endea-

vour to deſtroy reveal'd Religion, and reduce all to the Religion of Nature, ſo the next Step is to give ſuch an Account of natural Religion, and to reduce it to ſuch Principles as may baniſh all Fears of future Puniſhment, and the juſt Judgments of God for their Crimes. And it muſt be own'd, this Writer, after all his glorious Pretences, has made large Advances this way, and his Principles (as he manages them) will go a great way to make the Wicked eaſy in their Vices, and free their Minds from the Terrors that hang about them. I cannot therefore but look upon his Scheme, taking it all together, to have as bad an Aſpect on the Intereſts of natural Religion as reveal'd.

I ſhall only make one Obſervation more on the Spirit and Deſign of the Author's Book, and which may further let us ſee what Obligations we are under to him for his Attempt, and that is, that many Paſſages of his Book ſeem plainly calculated to promote the Popiſh Cauſe. He inſinuates, that *there is no Medium between Popery and natural Religion*; ſo that if we be Chriſtians we muſt be Papiſts. He repreſents the Proteſtants as a ſtrange inconſiſtent Kind of People, and the Papiſts as the only conſiſtent Chriſtians. He puts Popery and Chriſtianity on the ſame Foot, as if the Arguments brought in Proof of the one wou'd equally favour the other. How juſt theſe Reflections are I ſhall have occaſion to ſhew, when I come to conſider thoſe Paſſages of the Author's Book; at preſent I ſhall only obſerve, that whatever his Deſign might be, he cou'd not more

more effectually ſerve the Intereſts of Popery than by ſuch Inſinuations.

I ſhall conclude this Introduction with obſerving, that though it cannot but fill every true Chriſtian with a deep Concern, to ſee ſuch open Attempts againſt the Honour of our bleſſed Lord and our holy Religion, yet ſome Advantages may be drawn even from the Malice and Virulence of our Adverſaries.

One Effect of it I hope will be, to put profeſſed Chriſtians upon more ſeriouſly conſidering and weighing the Nature and Excellency of the Chriſtian Religion, and the ſolid and glorious Evidences whereby it ſtands confirm'd; the Conſequence of which will be, that Chriſtianity will be both better underſtood and more firmly believ'd; and thoſe that profeſs it will have their Faith fix'd on a more ſolid Foundation than meer Education, Cuſtom, and ſuch other Grounds which will equally ſerve a falſe Religion as the true.

Another Uſe that ſhou'd be made of theſe Attempts againſt Chriſtianity ſhou'd be to make Chriſtians, eſpecially Divines, more cautious, when they conſider that there is a watchful Enemy ready to take advantage of every raſh unguarded Expreſſion or Conceſſion, and turn it to the Prejudice of the common Cauſe. Any one that is acquainted with the Writings of our modern Deiſts, knows that a great Part of the Strength of their Books conſiſts in Citations drawn from the Writings of Chriſtian Divines; tho' it muſt be own'd that there is often a great deal of Art us'd to miſrepreſent and pervert their Senſe.

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It shou'd also ingage us to put a higher Value on the Christian Religion consider'd in its primitive Purity, as laid down in the Gospel, to consider that the most plausible Objections urg'd by our Author and others his Fellow-labourers in the same Cause, are drawn from the Additions that have been made to it, and the Corruptions that have been introduc'd in After-ages; and that he has been able to say very little against Christianity it self as deliver'd by Christ and his Apostles, though we may be sure he wanted no Inclination to do so.

Finally, when we consider what Advantages the Enemies of Christianity take from the Corruption of Morals among professed Christians, as well as from their Disputes and Contentions, and especially that Spirit of Bitterness that has too often carried them to revile and persecute one another, this ought to ingage all those that have the Interests of our holy Religion at Heart to study to adorn it by a holy exemplary Conversation, and to lay aside their Disputes and Animosities about lesser Matters, or at least to manage them without bitterness, that they may not bring Disgrace on the most excellent, and the most kind and benevolent Institution in the World.

Fas est & ab hoste doceri.

Thus we ought to learn even from our Enemies, and turn their malicious Attempts to our own Advantage, and then it is to be hop'd that the Issue of these desperate Attempts against Christianity will only be the strengthening and promoting the Interests of that Religion they are designed to subvert.

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ANSWER

To a late

BOOK

Intituled,

Christianity as Old as the Creation.

CHAP. I.

A General Account of the Scheme of the Author of Christianity as old as the Creation, and the various Senses in which he takes the Law of Nature.

THE Author of Christianity as old as the Creation sets out very gloriously. He thinks, "he has "laid down such plain and evident "Rules as may enable Men of the meanest

" Capacity to diſtinguiſh between Religion " and Superſtition, and has repreſented the " Former in every part, ſo beautiful, ſo " amiable, and ſo ſtrongly affecting, that " they who in the leaſt reflect, muſt be " highly in love with it; and eaſily perceive " that their Duty and Happineſs are inſepa- " rable," ſee his Preface. He thinks he *deſerves to be heard*, whilſt he endeavours to defend the *Liberty given by God to Mankind*, and to *attack the darling Weakneſſes and Follies of falſe Chriſtians*.

The Method he propoſes for this is to ſhow that *Chriſtianity is as old as the Creation*, or that the *Goſpel is a Republication of the Law of Nature*. One wou'd be apt to judge from this, that the Deſign of his Book muſt be to ſhew, how agreeable the Goſpel is to the Law of Nature; that it explains the great Principles and inforces the Duties of that Law, and clearly publiſhes it to the World. And if ſo, he who profeſſes ſo high an Eſteem for the Law of Nature, ought to have proportionably a very great Eſteem for Chriſtianity. But this is far from his Intention; inſtead of endeavouring to ſhew the Agreement there is between the Scripture Revelation, and the Law of Nature, he takes a great deal of pains to ſhew that the one of theſe is abſolutely inconſiſtent with the other. He often talks of *internal* and *external Revelation*, and propoſes to ſhew that *Religion whether internally or externally reveal'd muſt*

must be the same; but this is only to save Appearances; since the evident Design of his Book is to prove, that there never was nor cou'd be any external Revelation at all distinguish'd from the Light of Nature common to all Mankind; and that the Pretence or Belief of such external Revelation has been the unhappy Source of all that Superstition that has produc'd such infinite Mischief in the World; and particularly that the Revelation suppos'd to be contain'd in the Scriptures, naturally tends to draw Men off from the Purity and Simplicity of the Original Law of Nature, and to adulterate it with debasing Mixtures: That therefore the best Thing that can be done for the Happiness of Mankind is to engage them to throw off all Revelation at once, and particularly to lay aside the Authority of the Scriptures, as Books which naturally tend to mislead us, and to adhere to the pure simple Dictates of Nature. That he may therefore answer that Design which in great Compassion to a World over-run with Superstition he has undertaken, he sets himself to shew the absolute Perfection, Immutability, and Clearness of the Law of Nature. It is so perfect that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent Revelation, and to pretend to add to it is to destroy it; and at the same Time it is so clear that it cannot be made clearer to any Man by any external Revelation than it is to all Men without it. These are the two main Pillars of his Scheme, and if

either of these fail him the whole falls. For if the Law of Nature be not absolutely perfect, then something may be added to it, and here there may be Room for an external Revelation; and on the other hand tho' we shou'd suppose it perfect, yet if it be not clear and easily known to all Mankind, here again an external Revelation may come in, and be of signal Use to render it clearer than it wou'd be without it. our Author is sensible of this, and therefore sets himself, and it is the Design of his Book, to prove both these. But his Scheme is so unhappily chosen that what he offers to support one Part of it does in effect overturn the other.

In order to prove that the Law of Nature is absolutely perfect, he represents it as comprehending *every Thing that is founded on the Nature and Reason of Things*; that it is the *Rule to God himself*, and *to all rational Beings* throughout the Universe, and wou'd be so to *ten thousand Worlds more if there were so many*; that it takes in all that it is possible for God in any Circumstances to require, and all that the Creatures can in any possible Circumstances be oblig'd to know or do. And if the Law of Nature be taken in this vast comprehensive Sense, it will easily be own'd that it is absolutely perfect and nothing can be added to it. For what can be added to that which is suppos'd to comprehend the whole extent of Truth and Duty relating to

God and the Creatures in every possible Circumstance? but then it is the easiest Thing in the World to prove, that the Law of Nature taken in this vast extensive Sense is not so clear to all Mankind, that they need no Information about it. How can it be said, that no *great Wisdom is requir'd to know the Law of Nature* in this comprehensive View, and *that no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of it*, as this Gentleman speaks, p. 398? can any one be perswaded to think, that the whole extent of Things with all the Relations and Respects they bear to one another, and all the Fitnesses arising from them throughout this vast Universe, relating either to God or the Creatures, lies open to every Man's Understanding, even to those of the *meanest Capacity* and that are *not able to read in their Mother-tongue*, p. 295? Indeed if the Law of Nature takes in all that is founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, then none can fully know it but he that has a full Comprehension of the whole Nature and Extent of Things, which I conceive is peculiar to God himself. And then there may be Things relating to the Law of Nature taken in this extensive Sense, that is, relating to the Nature and Reason or Fitness of Things, which are well known to God, but are not so to us, except he is pleas'd to take some way to discover them to us; so that on this View of the Law of Nature there might be room enough for an external Revelation: It is manifest there-

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fore that this Notion of the Law of Nature can be of no great Service to the Authors main Deſign.

But there is another Notion of the Law of Nature which this Gentleman frequently inſiſts upon. He ſeems to take it preciſely for that Law which was given to Man in the Beginning at his firſt Creation; and therefore he calls it *Original Revelation*; but it is manifeſt that the Law of Nature taken in this Senſe is not of the ſame Extent with the former, nor deſerves thoſe magnificent Epithets which this Writer beſtows upon it. For how can it be ſaid that the Law given to Man in the Beginning comprehends *every Thing that is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things*, or that this is the Law by which God himſelf in all Caſes is to act, and that it is a Law to all intelligent Beings throughout the Univerſe, and wou'd be ſo to *ten thouſand Worlds if there were ſo many*? except it can be prov'd that all other Beings that actually inhabit this vaſt Univerſe, or that cou'd poſſibly exiſt in any other Worlds, muſt neceſſarily be of the ſame Nature with Man, and in the ſame Circumſtances, and muſt ſuſtain juſt the ſame Relations. All that can be reaſonably ſaid concerning this Original Law given to Man at the Beginning is, that ſince it was founded as this Gentleman alledges in the Nature and Fitneſs of Things, we may be ſure it was very well ſuited to the Condition and Circumſtances Man was at firſt in; but ſuppoſing an Alteration in the Circumſtances of Mankind from what

what they were at the Beginning, (and that ſuch an Alteration is poſſible muſt be own'd, except it be ſaid that Man is abſolutely immutable) then there may be an Addition to that original Law, or ſome new Conſtitution ſuited to that Alteration in the Condition and Circumſtances of Mankind. And on this Suppoſition alſo there is room for an external Revelation.

There is another Notion of the Law of Nature advanc'd by this Writer, differing in ſome reſpects from either of the former; having objected to himſelf, "May not the "Law of Nature be very clear, tho' the Light "of Nature be ſo very dim as to have unde- "niable Defects?" He anſwers, "Can the "Law of Nature be clear, and the Light of "Nature dim, when the Law of Nature is "nothing but what the Light of Nature or "Reaſon dictates?" p. 376. where he makes the Law of Nature and the Light of Nature to be exactly of the ſame Extent, ſo that what may be affirm'd of the one may be affirm'd of the other too; and by the Light of Nature he underſtands the Knowledge all Men have of Truth and Duty, meerly by their own Reaſon in the preſent State of Mankind. To the ſame purpoſe he defines the *Religion of Nature*, which with him is a Term of the ſame ſignification with the *Law of Nature*, to conſiſt in "the Senſe and Practice "of thoſe Duties, which reſult from the "Knowledge we by our Reaſon have of God "and his Perfections, and of our ſelves and our "own Imperfections, and of the Relation we

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" ſtand in to him and to our Fellow-creatures." p. 14. But this is really to alter his Scheme: for when he is endeavouring to ſhew, that the Law of Nature is abſolutely perfect, and nothing can be added to it, he repreſents it as comprehending every thing that is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things; and therefore as the Law by which God governs his Actions, and by which all rational Beings throughout the Univerſe, and in ten thouſand Worlds more, if there were ſo many, muſt govern theirs: But in order to ſhew, that the Law of Nature is clear to all Mankind, he wou'd have it to be meaſur'd not meerly by the Reaſon and Fitneſs of things, but by the Knowledge Men have of that Reaſon and Fitneſs; ſo that though we ſhould ſuppoſe any Truth or Duty to be founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things, yet if Men do not know it by their own Reaſon, it is not the Law of Nature. Yea, he ſeems often to expreſs himſelf, as if by the Law of Nature he underſtood not meerly what Men may know by the Uſe of their own Reaſon in their preſent State, but what all Men actually do know. And accordingly he ſets himſelf to ſhew, that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in Fact univerſal, p. 379, 380. But then it is manifeſt, that if we take the Law of Nature in this Senſe, it is far from deſerving the glorious Epithets he beſtows upon it. For is the Knowledge all Men have of Truth and Duty, or of the Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things, ſo abſolutely perfect, that nothing can be added to it? In this Senſe it may juſtly be affirm'd, and ſhall afterwards be proved, that the Law or

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Light of Nature, in the present State of Mankind, taking them as they now are, is very imperfect and defective; and an additional external Revelation may be of great Use, to give Men a clearer Knowledge of many Things which they do not know, or not so certainly by the meer Light of their own unassisted Reason.

Thus it appears, that after all the Stir this Gentleman makes about the Law of Nature, as the only Rule for Mankind to govern themselves by, he seems not to have fix'd his Scheme, or to know precisely himself, or at least to let his Readers know what he intends by it. He takes the Law of Nature in very different Senses, and yet every where applies the same glorious Epithets to it, of absolute Perfection, Immutability, Eternity, Clearness, *&c.* He affirms Things of that Law in one of these Senses, which are only true of it in another; and this spreads an artful Confusion through his whole Book. But though, according to the different Acceptations of the Law of Nature, it will appear in very different Views, yet I cannot see that, taken in any of these Senses, it will answer the Author's Design, which is to shew, that there is no need at all, nor can be any Use for an external Revelation. For if the Law of Nature be taken in the most general comprehensive Sense, as comprehending every thing founded in the Reason and Nature of Things, every thing that it is fit for God himself to do or to require, or for the Creatures to perform, in any suppos'd Circumstance or State of Things; I grant, that no Revelation, if true, can con-

tain any thing but what is comprehended in that Law, and may be reduc'd to it; but then I say, that there may be many Things that belong to that Law taken in this vast Extent, that is, there may be many Things fit for God to do or to require, which we could not pretend certainly to know, without an extraordinary Revelation. But if the Law of Nature be taken precisely for the Law given to Men at the Beginning, then supposing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind from what they were in the Beginning, there may be a new Constitution, differing in some respects from that original One, and there may be Things proper to be known and done in relation to it, of which an external Revelation may be highly useful to inform us. Or if the Law of Nature be taken only to signify the Knowledge Men now have by their own Reason, in its present State, of what is fit to be known and done, of God's Methods of dealing with us and of our Duty to him, 'tis evident that in this Sense the Law of Nature is incumbred with much Darkness, and subject to great Defects, and an external Revelation may be of signal Use to clear many Things to us, which in the present depraved State of Mankind we could not have discovered and known at all, or could not have known with any Certainty, if left to our selves without the Assistance of such a Revelation.

There is one Observation more I would make with respect to the Account this Gentleman gives of the Law of Nature, and that is, that though

though he often talks in very glorious Terms of the absolute Perfection and Immutability of that Law, and seems to suppose its Precepts to be of necessary and eternal and unalterable Obligation; yet at other Times he plainly supposes, that there are no fixed unalterable Rules of Morality at all; and that all that is to be understood by the Law of Nature is only this general Rule, that every Man must act according as the Circumstances he is under point out his Duty. He tells us indeed, that "God has "from the Beginning given all Mankind some "Rule or Law for their Conduct," p. 3. and "that this Rule or Law is *absolutely perfect, incapable of Addition or Diminution*, ibid. But then if we would know what that Rule or Law is, which he supposes God to have given Men for their Conduct, let us consider what he offers, p. 18, 19, where he observes, that "consi-"dering the Variety of Circumstances Men "are under, and these continually changing "as well as being for the most part unforeseen, "'tis impossible to have Rules laid down by "any external Revelation for every particular "Case, and therefore there must be some stand-"ing Rule, discoverable by the Light of Na-"ture, to direct us in all such Cases. Here he talks of a standing Rule, or Law, to direct us in all Cases whatsoever; and he explains this standing Rule thus, that "we can't but know "if we in the least consider, that whatever Cir-"cumstances Men are plac'd in by the uni-"versal Cause of all Things, 'tis his eternal "and immutable Will, by his placing them in

" thoſe Circumſtances, that they act as theſe " require." And he adds, That " this will " direct a Man how to act in all Conditions of " Life." And after having told us, p. 345. That " it is the Tendency of Actions which " makes them either good or bad;" and, That " 'tis the Circumſtances Men are under, by " which we are to judge of the Tendency of " Actions;" he adds, p. 349. That " this is " a Rule without Exception; whereas all o- " ther general Rules are of little Uſe, when " applied to particular Caſes, becauſe of the " many Exceptions to them, founded on Rules " equally general." He calls it therefore an *univerſal and unexceptionable Rule*, and his *never-failing Rule of judging of Actions by their Tendency*, p. 350.

By comparing theſe ſeveral Paſſages it appears, that the only univerſal Rule, or ſtanding Law, which this Author ſuppoſes to be given to all Mankind for their Conduct, is this, That they muſt act as the Circumſtances they are under do require. And ſince he alſo tells us, That there is *a great Variety of Circumſtances*; and that *thoſe Circumſtances are continually changing, as well as for the moſt part unforeſeen*; and again, That *there are numberleſs Circumſtances which attend us, and which perpetually varying, may make the ſame Actions according as Men are differently affected by them good or bad*, p. 27. I don't ſee how he can ſuppoſe that there are any fixed moral Rules or Precepts at all, that are of unchangeable Obligation; for he tells us, that all ſuch Rules (for

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of moral Rules or Precepts he is there ſpeaking) have ſuch a Multitude of Exceptions, that they are of little Uſe, when applied to particular Caſes. Now this ſeems not well reconcilable to the Account he at other Times gives of the Law of Nature. He often repreſents it, as if it were a Syſtem of Principles and moral Precepts, which are fixed and unalterable, and were ſo from the Beginning, to which nothing cou'd ever be added, and in which nothing cou'd ever be alter'd; which Syſtem or Collection of Principles and Precepts he repreſents as known to all Mankind; and that any external Revelation can only be a Tranſcript of that original Law. But here he ſeems to deſtroy this Scheme; the only ſtanding Rule that he ſuppoſes is not a Syſtem of Principles or moral Laws and Precepts, but only this general Rule, That we muſt act as the Circumſtances we are under point out to be our Duty. And into this general *ſtanding Rule* as he calls it, he ſeems to reſolve the whole Law of Nature, that Law which he ſuppoſes to be abſolutely perfect and immutable. So that properly ſpeaking, when he talks of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, he only means that this Rule or Law is immutable (and nothing elſe) that we muſt act according to the Circumſtances we are in. And as he ſuppoſes theſe Circumſtances to be very various, and to be continually changing, as well as for the moſt part unforeſeen, ſo he muſt alſo ſuppoſe that our Duties are continually varying, and that there are no fixed unchangeable Rules of Morality at all.

But

But certainly this *ſtanding Rule* or Law he talks of, when thus generally propos'd is of no great Uſe or Service to Mankind. It will not give them much Aſſiſtance or Direction to tell them, that they muſt act in all Caſes as the Circumſtances they are under do require, and point out to be for their own or the general Good. And if notwithſtanding this ſtanding Rule or Law, the Uſefulneſs of which he ſo much magnifies, it is an Advantage to Mankind as it evidently is to have written Laws and the Inſtructions of Moraliſts for their better Guidance and Direction in their Duty, I can't ſee but that this ſtanding Rule will ſtill leave Room enough for an external divine Revelation to inſtruct Mankind, both what Duty God requires of them, and what they are to expect from God, which they might otherwiſe be often at a Loſs to know for want of a full View of the Reaſons and Circumſtances of Things. And to leave Men as this Writer ſeems to do without any fix'd Rules of Morality at all, and to diſcard all moral Laws and Precepts as uſeleſs under Pretence of the many Exceptions to them, and to leave every Man to do as he thinks beſt in the Circumſtances he is in without any other Direction, is in my Opinion of great Diſſervice to the Law of Nature itſelf, and to the Cauſe of Virtue and Morality for which he profeſſes ſo great a Zeal.

Upon the whole it is very hard to form a Notion of what this Author underſtands by the Law of Nature, tho' his Subject ſhou'd have led

led him to have treated it distinctly. I shall not at present enter on a particular Consideration of the Law of Nature, which has been sufficiently done by others; my Design being chiefly to consider the Author's own Scheme, and the Notions he advances of that Law with a View to render an external Revelation useless or impossible.

Something however, I shall offer briefly and in general concerning the Law of Nature, which may tend to clear our Way to a right Understanding of the present Question.

I freely own, and so do the most zealous Advocates for Revelation, that there is a Law of Nature obligatory on Mankind as reasonable Creatures, moral Agents, and which wou'd have oblig'd them tho' there had never been any extraordinary Revelation, or written Law at all; so that in this Case, they cou'd not be said to be without a Law, or without a Religion; or in other Words, I own there is such a Thing as natural Religion.

More particularly, there are some Principles of great and universal Importance, relating to the Being, the Attributes, the Providence of God, Man's Free-agency, the moral Differences of Things, and future Retributions, which it highly concerns all Mankind to know and to acknowledge. There are also Duties incumbent upon Men with respect to God; with respect to one another, and with respect to themselves and the right Government of their own Appetites, which they are oblig'd to observe;

obſerve; and which may be juſtly ſaid to be founded on the very Nature and Conſtitution of Things; in as much as there is a real Fitneſs, and Decency, and Congruity in them, antecedently to any poſitive Appointment, and independent of Opinion, or Cuſtom, or human Compact.

I own, that the Reaſon of Mankind when rightly exercis'd and improv'd, will approve thoſe Principles and thoſe Duties as moſt juſt and true, moſt reaſonable and fitting; and that there is a kind of natural Senſe of Right and Wrong, of the moral Beauty and Fitneſs of Things, and the contrary, which when it is not depray'd and over-power'd by vicious Prejudices, and by the Influence of exorbitant Luſts and Appetites, and partial ſelfiſh Intereſts, tends to lead Men to Eſteem and chuſe ſome Actions as good and fit, beautiful and lovely, from the Practice of which there ariſes an inward Satisfaction and Complacency, and to diſlike and condemn the contrary, the Practice of which accordingly produces an inward Diſſatisfaction and Remorſe; and that in all ſuch Caſes Reaſon alſo leads Men to conclude, that it is the Will of God that they ſhou'd do thoſe Things and ſhun the contrary. And when once we regard it as the Will of God our ſupreme Lord and moral Governour, then we conſider it not meerly as fit and reaſonable in itſelf but as a divine Law. For that which properly makes any Thing a divine Law, is its being inforc'd by the Will and Authority of the divine Lawgiver who therefore will reward

ward or punish his reasonable Creatures according to their Obedience or Disobedience. And this divine Law may be justly call'd the Law of Nature, as having it's Foundation in Nature it self, and the real Differences of Things; and it may be call'd the the Law of Reason as being highly agreeable to the impartial, unprejudic'd Reason of Mankind.

This Law of Nature and Reason, which may be justly regarded as the Law of God, all Mankind are under; and in this Respect God has not *left himself without Witness* among the Gentiles; in as much, as from the Discoveries made in the Works of Creation and Providence, from the natural Sense of Good and Evil, some remains of which are in all Mankind, and from the Deductions of Reason rightly exercis'd and improv'd, they might have attain'd to a Knowledge of the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature or natural Religion.

But since it is evident in Fact and Experience (I am not now enquiring whence or how it came to be so, but it is evident in Fact that so it is) that Mankind are involv'd in great Darkness and Corruption, that their Reason and moral Sense is greatly weaken'd and deprav'd, so that if left to themselves they are apt to entertain very wrong Apprehensions of Religion, and very prone to Neglect and Counteract their Duty in the most important Instances; This being the true State of the Case, if God shou'd give an external extraordinary Revelation for clearing the great Principles of natural Religion which

thro' the Corruption of Mankind were incumbred with much Darkneſs and Prejudices, and for directing them in the ſeveral Parts of their Duty, and inforcing the practice of them by the moſt powerful and engaging Motives, and alſo, for diſcovering to them ſome Things which they cou'd not otherwiſe have certainly known and diſcover'd, and which yet are of great Uſe and Advantage to our Inſtruction and Comfort, this wou'd be a ſignal Benefit, and a great Inſtance of the divine Goodneſs and Compaſſion towards us.

Accordingly, God has actually given ſuch a Revelation contain'd in the holy Scriptures of the Old and new Teſtament, which exhibits a clear Diſcovery of the great Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, and renders them more obvious and certain, to the Bulk of Mankind than otherwiſe they wou'd be; and inforces the practice of univerſal Righteouſneſs with the ſtrongeſt Motives; and, beſides this inſtructs us in ſeveral Things of Importance to us to know which otherwiſe we cou'd not have certainly known and diſcover'd.

And this Revelation not only bears in it's Doctrines and Precepts the Characters of the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs, but was confirm'd by the moſt illuſtrious Atteſtations, particularly by numerous uncontrolled Miracles; Works viſibly tranſcending all human Power, and which therefore demonſtrate the Interpoſition of ſuperior Beings, which cou'd not be evil Ones, for they would never lend their

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Assistance to confirm a Religion, the great Design of which is to reclaim Sinners from Vice and Wickedness, and to promote universal Righteousness and Purity, and must therefore be done by the immediate Power of God himself, or which comes to the same Thing by the assistance and agency of good Beings acting under him and by his Direction. And of these Facts we have as full Proof as can be reasonably desir'd of any Facts which we our selves did not see, and which yet it wou'd be counted unreasonable not to believe.

From whence it follows, that it highly concerns us whom God hath favour'd with such a Revelation, to receive it with a reverential regard, and with a deep sense of our Obligations to his Goodness, to be unfeignedly thankful for it, and careful to improve it. And as to others who have not this Priviledge, it becomes us to leave them to God who hath not left himself without Witness among them, and who we may be sure will deal with them conformably to infinite Wisdom and Goodness.

Upon this View of Things, it appears that there is a Harmony and Agreement between the Law of Nature and external Revelation; that the Former does not make the Latter useless or unnecessary, and that the Latter is friendly to the Former, Clears, Strengthens and Improves it; sets the great Principles and Duties of it in a stronger Light, and inforces it with more powerful Motives, and makes additional

Diſcoveries of ſome Things which tho' otherwiſe we ſhou'd not have known tend highly to promote the end of all Religion, which is, to raiſe our Natures to the Perfection of Purity and Happineſs in the Viſion and Enjoyment of the Deity. Thus the Law of Nature and Revelation rightly underſtood mutually aſſiſt and ſupport each other; but the Author's Deſign is to advance ſuch a Notion of the Law of Nature as wou'd utterly exclude all Revelation, and render it not only uſeleſs but impoſſible. This has led him to give a ſtrange Account of the Law of Nature, and to ſay inconſiſtent Things concerning it, juſt as it anſwer'd his preſent Deſign.

But I ſhall now proceed to a more diſtinct Examination of his Scheme.

CHAP. II.

Concerning the vaſt Extent the Author gives to the Law of Nature, as taking in every Thing founded on the Reaſon and Nature of Things.

IT has been already obſerv'd that our Author often takes the Law of Nature in a very large and extenſive Senſe, as comprehending whatever is founded in the Reaſon and

and Nature of Things throughout the Universe. Indeed I don't see what this properly has to do in the present Question; since the Question properly is only about the Law that is given to Mankind, or what *it is necessary for Man to know, believe, profess, and practise*, as this Author expresses it, p. 5. And I think it must be own'd, that there may be many Things founded in the Reason of Things, taken in this extensive Sense, in which we are not properly concern'd. But since this Gentleman is pleas'd to represent the Law of Nature in this vast and comprehensive Extent, that he may the better prove and support the absolute Perfection of that Law, and that nothing can possibly be added to it; let us consider what he offers on this Head.

He tells us, p. 14. that the Law of Nature *takes in every thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things*. This he represents to be of so great an Extent, that it is the Law or Rule for God himself, and for all intelligent Beings, as well as Man; and he often expresses himself, as if he thought it was in the same Sense, and in the same respects a Rule and Law to God, and to all Creatures. To this purpose he observes, that this Law "is a perfect "Rule to the most perfect Being, and therefore "may much more be a Rule to his imperfect "Creatures, since their whole Perfection con-"sists in imitating him, and governing their "Actions by the *same Rule*, p. 398, 399." That "it is not only the first but the last Law "of God; for it is eternal, a Law by which "God

" God governs his own Actions, and by which " he expects the whole rational World ſhould " govern theirs; that it is neceſſary to be ob- " ſerv'd, not only in this World, and in ten " thouſand Worlds more, if there were ever " ſo many, but in Heaven it ſelf, and that too " for ever, p. 59." And he ſuppoſes this Law, which is the Rule to God, and to all reaſonable Beings, to be known to us in its juſt Extent. Thus in the Paſſage juſt cited, after having ſaid, that it is *the Law by which God governs his own Actions, and by which he expects the whole rational World ſhould govern theirs*, he adds, that " God daily implants it in the " Minds of all Men." He affirms, that " Rea- " ſon tells Men every thing God can be " ſuppos'd to require, p. 187." And again, that " what the Light of Nature teaches us " concerning the Divine Perfections, demon- " ſtrates what God, in his infinite Wiſdom or " Goodneſs, can or cannot command, p. " 103.

His Scheme therefore conſider'd in this view, as far as I am able upon the moſt impar- tial Conſideration to underſtand it, is this: That the eternal Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things (which he makes to be the Law of Nature) is the ſole Rule of God's Actions as well as ours; and that this Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things, according to which God proceeds in all his Dealings towards Man and other rational Beings, and by which we are to govern all our Actions, is known to us in its juſt Extent by our own Reaſon, with- out Revelation; and therefore we know by our

own

own Reaſon, without Revelation, all that it is fit for God at any Time to require, or for Men to know and practiſe; and conſequently need no Revelation to inform us in any Inſtance, either what God will do, and how he will deal with us, or what Conduct we are to obſerve.

This Scheme is certainly one of the moſt extraordinary that ever appear'd. And if this Author had open'd it at once, and laid it before the Reader in one View, it cou'd ſcarce impoſe upon the meaneſt Underſtanding; but he has taken great Care to involve it in ſuch Obſcurity, and to deliver it in ſuch a confus'd and ambiguous way, by ſcatter'd Hints throughout his Work, that it is no eaſy thing to underſtand his Meaning.

I ſhall not critically examine into the Propriety of that Expreſſion he ſo often makes uſe of, *the eternal Reaſon of Things*, and which he ſuppoſes to be the Rule of God's Actions; ſince the Things themſelves and their Natures, and conſequently the relations and reſpects they bear, did not exiſt from Eternity; the only Thing that can be meant by the eternal Reaſon of Things, and by its being a Rule to God, is this, That the infinite Mind of God eternally comprehends all the Ideas of Juſt and Good, of Regular and Beautiful, in all the poſſible Connexions and Combinations of Things; and that in all his Actions he proceeds according to the moſt fair and perfect Ideas of his own Mind. So that it might more properly be ſaid, that the Rule by which God always acts, is the *all-comprehending Reaſon of his own Mind*,

to

to which the perfect Rectitude of his Will is ever conformable. And this ſeems to be the Account the Author himſelf gives of it, p. 23. It was this Reaſon of his own Mind that determin'd him in creating the World, to do all Things in the moſt juſt and regular and admirable Order; and in governing the World he proceeds by the ſame Rule, that is, he always does that which appears to his own infinite Underſtanding to be moſt wiſe and juſt, and all Things conſider'd beſt and fitteſt to be done. And if this be all that this Gentleman means by ſaying, that the *Fitneſs of Things is the Rule of God's Actions*, and that his *Will is always determin'd by the Reaſon and Nature of Things*, if by this and ſuch other Expreſſions, which he ſo often repeats, be meant no more, than that God always does that which his own infinite Mind and Reaſon ſees to be fit and juſt and reaſonable for him to do, it will eaſily be own'd, that in this Senſe he always acts according to the Fitneſs of Things; but then many Things he may in his infinite Wiſdom ſee to be juſt and proper, which we ſhou'd not know to be ſo, except it pleas'd him to diſcover them to us. If the all-comprehending Reaſon of his own Mind be the Rule by which God acts, and according to which he governs the World, I think it muſt be own'd that this is of an infinitely greater Extent than that by which we act, as far tranſcending it as God's Underſtanding tranſcends ours.

The Account this Writer commonly gives of what he underſtands by the Reaſon of Things

is

is this, that it signifies the Natures of the Things themselves, and the various relations and respects they bear to one another, with the Fitnesses arising from them. If so, then the Reason of Things is wide and extensive as the whole Compass of universal Nature; it takes in the incomprehensible Nature of God himself, and the Natures and various relations and respects of all Beings whatsoever, both to God and to one another. And will this Author in good earnest undertake to shew, that Man, every Man of the meanest Capacity, even tho' he can't read in his Mother-Tongue (for to every such Person he supposes the Reason and Nature of Things to be clear and plain, p. 295.) comprehends the whole Extent of Things, the Nature of God himself, and of all other Beings, as well as his own, and all the possible respects of Things, and all the Fitnesses arising from them in every Circumstance?

Supposing the Fitness or Reason of Things, in this wide extensive Sense, to be the Rule according to which God acts in the Government of the World, yet I think it can't be denied that this universal Reason or Fitness of Things is only known to his own infinite Understanding, and therefore can only be a Rule to him, but not to us. When therefore this Author says, that God and Man must act according to the Reason of Things, the only tolerable Sense that this is capable of is, that as God always does what is fit and reasonable for him to do, so Man is also to do what is fit and reasonable for him to do; but not that the Reason of

Things by which God acts, is of the ſame Extent with that by which Man is to act. For none can ſuppoſe this, except he ſuppoſes that God and Man hold the ſame Rank in the Order of Beings, and are in the ſame Condition and Circumſtances; which is ſo palpably abſurd, that our Author himſelf wou'd not think proper to avow it. That Reaſon or Fitneſs of Things, according to which God acts, ariſes from the infinite Perfection of his own Nature, and from what his own infinite Wiſdom ſees to be moſt becoming him to do, as the ſupreme Governor of the World, and to be moſt conducive to the univerſal Order and Harmony of Things. And as there are many Reaſons and Fitneſſes relating to his own infinite Majeſty, and to the Order, Beauty, and Good of the whole, obvious to his perfect Underſtanding, which we do not know and cannot judge of, it follows that the Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things, by which he proceeds, is of a ſuperior Conſideration, and of far greater Extent than that by which Man governs his Actions; and many Things may be juſt and fit upon ſuch an extended View of Things, which do not appear to be ſo upon a narrower View; and conſequently many Things may ſeem to him to be juſt and proper, which we do not know to be ſo, becauſe we can take in only Part of the Scheme, and do not behold Things in their juſt Harmony. Indeed none can pretend to know what is for the Good of the whole Univerſe, to which the private Good of any particular Being or Order of Beings muſt give way, for the

ſame Reaſon that the private Good of any particular Perſon or Family muſt give way to that of the whole Society or Community, but he that knows the univerſal Syſtem of Things, and has a clear View of all the Natures of Things, and all the various reſpects and relations the ſeveral Orders of Beings bear to one another, and to the Whole, yea and of all Times and Seaſons; for ſome Things may ſeem fit or unfit for the preſent, which taking in Futurity, and the Effects and Conſequences of them, may have a contrary Aſpect

I cannot therefore acquit this Writer from great Raſhneſs, when he affirms, that "Reaſon tells us what is worthy of God, and "therefore tells us every thing God can be "ſuppos'd to require, p. 187." and "that what "the Light of Nature teaches us concerning "the Divine Perfections, when duly attended "to, demonſtrates what God in his infinite "Wiſdom or Goodneſs can or cannot command, p. 103." It is true, that in ſome plain Caſes we may certainly know, by the Reaſon he hath implanted in us, what infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs can or cannot require or do; and may ſafely pronounce accordingly. But then 'tis equally true, that we cannot in all Caſes take upon us to judge and to determine, what an infinitely wiſe and good Being may or may not ſee fit to do or to require; which is no more than to ſay, that we cannot comprehend the whole Extent of infinite Wiſdom, or pretend to know all the Reaſons he may have for his proceeding in ſuch a manner. And this

Writer himſelf declares, that he knows none at preſent that pretend to *ſo extenſive a Knowledge, as to take in the whole Scheme, Order and State of Things*, p. 384. And yet in many Paſſages of his Book, ſome of which have been cited above, he inſinuates that all rational Creatures muſt be capable of knowing that Reaſon of Things in its whole Extent, which he ſuppoſes to be the Rule of God's Actions, and conſequently muſt be capable of knowing, meerly by the Force of their own Reaſon, all that it is fit and proper, in any Inſtance, for God himſelf to do and to require, as well as what is proper for Man to do. A great Part of his Book proceeds upon this Suppoſition. 'Tis on this Principle that he argues againſt poſitive, or, as he calls them, arbitrary Precepts, and charges it as Tyranny in God to enjoin them; by which he means all Precepts that we our ſelves do not antecedently ſee the Fitneſs of. And indeed if God may have Reaſons for Things that we are not acquainted with, (which muſt be own'd, except it be ſaid that our Underſtandings are of an equal Extent with his) the Argument he has ſo much laboured falls. For though God always acts agreeably to the Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things, that is, always does and requires what is fit and proper for him to do and to require, yet if in many Caſes we are not proper Judges of that Reaſon and Fitneſs, then there may be Commands which he may ſee it proper to lay upon us, and there may be Methods of Procedure towards us, depending on his infinite Wiſdom, which he ſees the

Fitneſs

Fitneſs of, though we do not, and which we cou'd not well know, except he is pleas'd to reveal his Will; and he is the proper Judge of the fitteſt Manner and Method of communicating his Will to us, and may have many ways of doing it. From whence it follows, that if from Proofs ſufficient in their Kind, we come to know that he has thus diſcover'd and communicated his Will and Intentions to us, we are oblig'd to pay a ſacred Regard to thoſe Significations of his Will, in whatſoever manner they are made to us.

And now I think it appears, that all this Gentleman's magnificent Talk about the abſolute Perfection of the Law of Nature, as taking in every thing that is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things, a Law to God himſelf and to all reaſonable Beings, is of little Advantage to his main Deſign, which is to ſhew, that there can be no place nor uſe for an external Revelation; ſince the Law of Nature, taken in this vaſt Extent, is only perfectly known to God himſelf. Nor can he ever make this Part of his Scheme anſwer his Deſign, except he will pleaſe to prove that our Underſtandings are of equal Extent with infinite Wiſdom, and that we have an equal Comprehenſion of all the Natures of Things, and all their various reſpects and relations, and the Fitneſſes ariſing from thence (for this is what he means by the Reaſon of Things) throughout the whole Univerſe with God himſelf.

Leaving therefore this romantick Account of the Law of Nature, which the Author has advanc'd

vanc'd to prove its abſolute Perfection, let us conſider the Law of Nature in a narrower View, as properly relating to Man, and to what *it is the Will of God Men ſhou'd know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe*, as this Author ſpeaks, p. 5. And here his Notion is, that this Law of Nature, which is a Rule to Mankind, is that very Law, and no other, that was given to Man at his firſt Creation, to which nothing cou'd ever be added by any ſubſequent Revelation, and which is ſo clear to all Men, that it cannot be made clearer.

CHAP. III.

That the Law given to Mankind at the Beginning, was not ſo abſolutely Perfect, that nothing cou'd ever be added to it by any ſubſequent Revelation.

THE Author of Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation, frequently ſuppoſes the Law of Nature to be that Law which was given to Man at the Beginning, at his firſt Creation; and therefore calls it "the Law "of our Creation implanted in us from the "Beginning by God himſelf," p. 8. "The "true primitive and natural Religion implant-

"ed

" ed in Mankind from the Creation," p. 379, and to ſignify this, he deſcribes it under the Character of *Original Revelation.* And, this is that Senſe of the Law of Nature, to which the Deſign of his Book properly leads him, which is to ſhew that there can be no other Religion but what was given to Mankind from the beginning of the World without any Addition or Alteration; that therefore Chriſtianity muſt either be as Old as the Creation, or it cannot be a true Religion; that if it makes any Addition to that original natural Law, or in any Inſtance varies from it, (as in many Parts of his Book he endeavours to ſhew it does) this is a Proof that it is not a divine Revelation. Inſtead therefore of intitling his Book *Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation,* the Title wou'd have run more agreeably to his Deſign, thus, *Chriſtianity not as Old as the Creation, and therefore falſe.* But this might have ſhock'd his Readers too much at firſt, which for many Reaſons he thought not proper to do.

That I may do the Author Juſtice, I ſhall fairly repreſent his Scheme in his own Words.

He firſt lays it down as a Principle which will not be denied, that " none who believe " there is a God who governs Mankind, but " muſt believe he has given them a Law for " the governing their Actions; and that this " is implied in the very Notion of Go- " vernour and govern'd, p 10. That therefore it is certain that " God from the Be- " ginning gave Mankind ſome Rule or Law

" for

" for their Conduct; and that the obſerving " of that made them acceptable to him; or " elſe it wou'd not anſwer the End for which " it was given; that, that Religion which " God gave Men from the Beginning, was a " moſt perfect Religion; ſince no Religion " can come from a Being of infinite Wiſdom " and Perfection, but what is abſolutely per- " fect; and a Religion abſolutely perfect, " cannot admit of any Alteration, or be ca- " pable of Addition or Diminution, but muſt " be as immutable as the Author of it; and " therefore that external Revelation cannot " add any thing to a Religion thus abſolutely " perfect, univerſal, and immutable, p. 3, 4. He repreſents this as " the one true Religion, " which all have been ever bound to believe " and profeſs;" and that it contains " all that " God wills them to know, believe, profeſs, " and practiſe, p. 5." Accordingly the Title of his 6th Chapter runs thus, that " *the Religion of Nature* (by which he means, as he had deſcrib'd it in his firſt Chapter, the Religion or Law given to all Mankind from the Beginning) " is an abſolutely perfect Religion, and that " external Revelation can neither add to nor " take from its Perfection." He propoſes to himſelf an Objection, which he calls a plauſible one, in the Beginning of the ſeventh Chapter, " whether external Revelation, building on " the Foundation of natural Religion, may not " extend to ſuch Things as the Light of Na- " ture cou'd not reach, without contradicting " any thing it teaches?" And this he denies,

becauſe

becauſe he has prov'd, "that the Religion of "Nature is ſo perfect, that nothing cou'd be "added to it, p. 69," and then he goes on to ſhew, that "original Revelation (that is, the natural Law given to Man from the Beginning) "comprehends every thing that tends "to the Honour of God, and the Good of "Mankind, p. 70." He concludes therefore, that "this Perfection of the Law of Nature "ſufficiently expoſes all Pretences to a new "Religion.

It appears from theſe ſeveral Paſſages, and many others to the ſame Purpoſe, that the Perfection which our Author aſcribes to the original Law of Nature given to all Mankind at the Beginning, is ſuch an abſolute Perfection, as intirely excludes all Addition to it, or Variation from it, ſo that nothing can now make a Part of Religion, but what made a Part of Religion from the Beginning of the World; it muſt continue in all reſpects exactly the ſame that it was at firſt, neither more nor leſs; no more to be believ'd, and no more to be done by any Man than was at the Beginning of the Creation. It is on this Foundation that he argues, that there is no room for additional Revelation. I ſhall therefore examine it diſtinctly.

It will eaſily be granted, that the Law of Nature given to Man at the Beginning was perfect at firſt, if by that be meant no more than that it was excellently ſuited to the State Man was then in; but it does not follow, that it cou'd never admit of any Additions, except

it cou'd be prov'd, that God, by giving Man a Law, bound his own Hands, and brought himſelf under an Obligation never to lay any further Injunctions upon him, but what he requir'd of him when he was firſt created, and never to give any other Significations or Diſcoveries of his Will but what he then gave.

When Man was created, he receiv'd this Law among the reſt, as Part of the Law of Nature, that whatever it ſhou'd pleaſe God at any Time to require, he muſt yield a ready Obedience to it; and if in conſequence of this, God ſhou'd be pleas'd to ſignify his Will in any particular Inſtance, then this wou'd from that Moment commence Man's Duty, though not before; and it might ſtill be ſaid in that caſe, that Man acted up to the *original Obligation of the Fitneſs of Things* (to uſe the Author's Expreſſions).

If Man had continued in a State of Innocence, his Reaſon uncorrupt and unprejudic'd, though he might clearly collect the ſtanding Part of his Duty, yet he cou'd not even then pretend of himſelf to know all that God might at any Time for various Reaſons think fit to enjoin. There was nothing in the original Law of his Creation to make him think that God cou'd not or wou'd not at any Time require any thing but what he then actually requir'd; only this he might be ſure of, that God wou'd never require any thing but for juſt and wiſe Reaſons; and in what way ſoever he ſhou'd ſignify his Will, it was his Duty to lie open to thoſe Diſcoveries.

It

It may therefore juſtly be affirm'd, that tho' Mankind had continued in a State of perfect uncorrupted Innocence, there might have been room for Additions to that original Law that was given to Man at the Beginning of the Creation. But ſuppoſing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumſtances of Mankind ſince that Law was given, it is ſtill more evident that it might be fit and proper to add ſomething to that original Law, accommodated to that Alteration of Circumſtances.

I don't ſee with what Conſiſtency this Author himſelf can talk of the abſolute Perfection and Immutability of the original Law of Nature, ſince (as has been already obſerv'd) he himſelf makes Men's Duty to be varied according to the Alteration of Circumſtances. He talks indeed often of the immutable Nature, and the unchangeable Relations of Things. He tells us, p. 61. that "the Reaſon why the "Law of Nature is perfect, is, becauſe it is "founded on the unalterable Reaſon of "Things;" Or as he expreſſes it, p. 6. "on "the Nature of Things, and the immutable "Relations they bear to one another." He often mentions the unchangeable Fitneſs of Things; but then he lays it down as a Rule, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which "makes them either good or bad; and 'tis the "Circumſtances Men are under by which we "are to judge of the Tendency of Actions, p. 345. And theſe Circumſtances he repreſents as continually changing, p. 18. And again, p. 27. he talks of "the numberleſs Circum-

" ſtances which attend us, and which perpe-
" tually varying, may make the ſame Actions,
" according as Men are differently affected by
" them, good or bad." And this, according to him, holds not meerly in Matters indifferent, but in Things of a moral Nature, for of theſe he is ſpeaking in the Paſſages now cited; and the Inſtances he produces are of this kind, p. 344, 345. He tells us particularly, p. 345. that " what we call Inceſt, is now for many
" good Reaſons not to be allow'd of; yet it
" was a Duty in the Children of *Adam* and
" *Eve*." Here therefore is an Inſtance of a Thing which originally was lawful and a Duty in the Beginning of the World, but which afterwards became unlawful, upon an Alteration in the State and Circumſtances of Mankind. Indeed after all his magnificent Talk of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, and the unchangeable Nature and Fitneſs of Things, he ſeems to me to think, that there is no Duty of an unchangeable Nature, none but what may vary according to the Alteration of Circumſtances; and no particular Precept, but what may in ſome Inſtances ceaſe to oblige, and of a Duty become a Sin, and the contrary. It cannot therefore be ſaid, that the Law of Nature was ſo immutably fix'd in the Beginning, that nothing could become a Duty to Man afterwards, which was not ſo then; and yet this ſeems to be the Strain of his reaſoning in many Parts of his Book, and particularly in his firſt Chapter, and without which it falls to the Ground. If he ſays, that ſtill the Law of Nature

ture is immutable; for though that particular Thing, which was our Duty before by that Law, may upon an Alteration of Circumstances cease to oblige, yet the Law is still the same, which requires us to act according to the Nature of Things, and the Circumstances we are in. This Excuse, which is the only one that can be made, and which he seems to insinuate for salving his Hypothesis, and rendring his Scheme consistent, does really destroy it. For at this rate, the suppos'd Perfection and Immutability of that original Law, given to Man at his first Creation, does not hinder but that there may be Additions and Alterations suited to the Circumstances Men might afterwards be in; and consequently this Argument against Revelation is good for nothing, That the Law given to Mankind was perfect at the Beginning, and therefore external Revelation cou'd not add any thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect and immutable.

By this we may judge of the Strength of the great Argument the Author urges with so much Pomp, for the Perfection of the original Law of Nature given to Mankind at the Beginning, drawn from the Perfection of its Author. He tells us, p. 3. that "no Religion can come "from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Per-"fection, but what is absolutely perfect; and "a Religion absolutely perfect cannot admit "of any Alteration, or be capable of Addi-"tion and Diminution, but must be as immu-"table as the Author of it." And again, p. 60. "Can Laws be imperfect, where a Le-"gislator

" ſlator is abſolutely perfect? Can Time diſ-
" cover any thing to him, which he did not
" foreſee from Eternity? And as his Wiſdom
" is always the ſame, ſo is his Goodneſs; and
" conſequently from the Conſideration of
" both theſe, his Laws muſt always be the
" ſame. The Law of Nature therefore muſt
" be as perfect a Law as the Goſpel, except
" you will ſay, that God did not arrive to the
" Perfection of Wiſdom and Goodneſs, till
" about 1700 Years ſince." And accordingly he adds, p. 61. that " if Chriſtianity was a
" new Religion, then from the Time it com-
" menc'd, you muſt own God is mutable; and
" that ſuch Additions have been made to the
" all-perfect Laws of infinite Wiſdom, as con-
" ſtitute a new Religion.

I think if there were any thing in this way of arguing, it might as well prove that becauſe God is abſolutely perfect and immutable, therefore all the Works he hath made muſt be perfect and immutable too. And indeed though God, the Giver of the Law, the Author of that original Conſtitution eſtabliſh'd at Man's firſt Creation, be perfect and unchangeable in himſelf, yet except it cou'd be alſo prov'd, that Man, to whom that Law was given, and for whom that Conſtitution was made, is immutable too and abſolutely perfect, and his Circumſtances incapable of Alteration, it cannot be concluded that that original Law and Conſtitution is abſolutely immutable and capable of no Additions or Alterations; for upon Suppoſition that Man is ſubject to change, (and who can

can deny it?) and that there is an Alteration in his Circumstances from what they were at first, a wise and good God may see it proper to give new Injunctions, and enter into some new Methods of dealing with him, for which there was no Occasion at first, nor wou'd have been without such an Alteration in his State and Circumstances. I own that "Inconstancy, as "it argues a Defect of Wisdom or Power, can't "belong to a Being infinitely wise and power-"ful," as the Author speaks, p. 20. But then he himself tells us, p. 105. that "did not God "always employ the most fit and suitable "means, he wou'd act contrary to the Rules "prescrib'd him by his own unerring Reason;" and that "to alter one's Conduct, as Circum-"stances alter, is not only an Act of the great-"est Prudence and Judgment, but is consistent "with the greatest Steadiness, *ibid.*

'Tis true God perfectly saw and knew all Things from the Beginning; he saw all those Alterations or Changes that were to happen in the successive Revolutions of Ages; and he knew from the Beginning what Course it was proper for him to take in every suppos'd Circumstance of Things. But it does not follow, that therefore he gave all the Revelations and all the Laws at once from the first, that ever he shou'd think fit to give; but rather that as the Changes and Alterations were to happen successively, and to have their Effect in their proper Seasons, so his Laws and Constitutions were successively to take place according to the Exigency of Things.

When

When therefore this Writer argues, that "if "there were the leaſt Difference between the "Law of Nature and the Goſpel, that wou'd "ſuppoſe ſome Defect in one of them, and re-"flect upon the Author of both, who cer-"tainly was equally good and wiſe, when he "gave the one as when he gave the other (if it "may be call'd another) Law, p. 378." Not to take Notice of the Diſingenuity of this Paragraph, where he ſpeaks as if he believ'd that God was the Author of the Goſpel, when it is certain, that if by the Goſpel be meant, what all underſtand by it, the Chriſtian Religion as contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, he is far from believing that God was the Author of it: To paſs this by; though there be ſome Difference between the original Law of Nature given to Man at the Beginning, and the Goſpel, this does not argue a Defect in either of them. For ſuppoſing the one to be the Law of innocent Nature given to Man at the Beginning at his firſt Creation, the other to be a Conſtitution adapted to the Condition of Man as in a ſinful State, there may be ſome Difference (though no Contradiction) between them, ariſing from the different Circumſtances of Mankind to which they reſpectively have a Reference, and yet both may be perfect in their Kind, and wiſely order'd, and each of them admirably ſuited to the Deſign for which they were given and appointed.

Our Author indeed ſuppoſes that the State of Things between God and Man is now exactly the ſame that it was at firſt, and upon that builds

builds an Argument for the Immutability of the original Law of Nature, to ſhew that it is incapable of any Addition or Alteration. "If God "is unchangeable (ſays he) our Duty to him "muſt be ſo too; if human Nature continues "the ſame, and Men at all Times ſtand in the "ſame Relation to one another, the Duties "which reſult from thoſe Relations muſt be "always the ſame; and conſequently our "Duty to God and Man muſt, from the Be-"ginning of the World to the End, always "be the ſame, always alike plain and perſpi-"cuous, and can neither be chang'd in whole "nor in part, p. 28." And to the ſame Purpoſe he ſaith, p. 188. that "Religion thus "founded on thoſe immutable Relations (viz. the Relations Men ſtand in to God and to one another) "muſt at all Times and in all Places "be alike immutable; ſince external Revela-"tion not being able to make any Change in "thoſe Relations, and the Duties that neceſ-"ſarily reſult from them, can only recom-"mend and inculcate thoſe Duties." All that theſe Paſſages prove is, that the main fundamental Duties of Morality are the ſame now that they were from the Beginning, which will be freely granted. And this is all that the many long Quotations this Gentleman produces with ſo much Pomp from many Chriſtian Divines, concerning the immutable Obligation of the Law of Nature, do prove. And in this Senſe it may be juſtly ſaid, that our Saviour *came not to deſtroy the Law, but to fulfil it*, to ſet the great Principles of it in a clear-

er and ſtronger Light, when almoſt loſt and defac'd thro' the Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, and to engage Men, by the moſt powerful Motives, to a diligent Obſervance of its Precepts. In this Senſe it will be eaſily acknowledg'd (what the Author needleſly takes a great deal of Pains to prove) that *no inſtituted Religion can contradict the Law of Nature*; and that there is an *exact Conformity* (as he expreſſes it) *between internal and external Revelation*; that is, that the one cannot contradict the other, and any pretended inſtituted Religion that contradicts or ſubverts any of thoſe Rules of Morality that neceſſarily flow from the Relations between God and Man, muſt be falſe. But if the Queſtion be as this Gentleman himſelf puts it, p. 69. *Whether external Revelation, building on the Foundation of natural Religion, may not extend to ſuch Things as the Light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches*? there is nothing in the Argument by him here propos'd to prove that it cannot be ſo.

Let us ſuppoſe the Relation between God and Man to be unchangeable; this does not prove, that nothing cou'd ever become a Duty to Man, but what was ſo in the Beginning of the Creation; for this very Relation neceſſarily lays him under an Obligation to obey whatſoever Injunctions God ſhou'd at any Time, in his infinite Wiſdom, ſee fit to lay upon him. It may be ſaid in ſome Senſe, that *human Nature continues the ſame*, that is, the ſame in its eſſential

essential Faculties, in all that is essentially necessary to constitute human Nature; but this is consistent with a very great Variation in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind, and this may make it proper to give some new Constitutions accommodated to that Change in their Circumstances and Condition. Thus, *e. g.* a Change from a State of Innocence to a State of Guilt and Disobedience to God, whenever or howsoever that happened, must be a very great and considerable Change in the Condition of Mankind. And such a Change there certainly was, take what Hypothesis you please. There was a Time when Man was innocent, and when he had not sinned; except it be said, that God made Man at his first Creation actually sinful and corrupt, which wou'd be to charge our Corruption upon God himself as the Author, and lay the Blame of all our Transgressions and Follies upon the original Constitution of the human Nature. And this Writer, who so zealously contends that God gave Man at his first Creation a perfect Law to be govern'd by, and form'd Man to be govern'd by that Law, must also maintain, if he be consistent with himself, that God made Man at first every way capable to fulfil and obey that Law; and indeed he affirms, that every Man is still able to do it, p. 376. The Question he puts, p. 4. "Shall we say that God, who had "the forming human Understanding as well as "his own Laws, did not know how to adjust "the one to the other?" may be equally ap- [illegible] to prove, that God adjusted Man's origi-

nal Ability to that perfect original Law. Whenever therefore Man first sinned and transgressed the Divine Law, at what Time soever this happen'd, there must necessarily be a remarkable Alteration in his Condition and Circumstances. The same Light of Nature that discover'd that original Law and his Duty to him, cou'd not but discover to him, that the Breach of that Law render'd him obnoxious to the Divine Displeasure; and this must fill him with guilty Fears. The essential Relations between God and Man did indeed still continue the same; that is, God still sustain'd the Character of Man's Creator and Sovereign Lord, his most wise Governor and Judge; and Man was still as much as before related to God as his Creature, his Subject and Servant; but then God was now further to be consider'd as the offended Law-giver and Judge, most justly displeas'd with his guilty Creature, and Man was to be consider'd as a Transgressor of the Law given him for the Rule of his Duty, and who had by his Disobedience forfeited his Title to the Divine Favour, and the Reward he wou'd otherwise have obtain'd. Here then was a remarkable Alteration of Circumstances, or Change in the State of Things between God and Man. If therefore God shou'd, in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, establish a new Constitution, suited to the Alteration of Man's Circumstances, in which he declares what wou'd be his Method of dealing towards his guilty Creatures, how far and upon what Terms he wou'd be reconcil'd, and what Reward he wou'd be-

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ſtow even upon their imperfect Obedience, this wou'd not properly be an abrogating that originel Law in its preceptive Part, or a cancelling the Obligations and Duties which neceſſarily flow from the Relations between God and Man, or between Men themſelves; but a gracious Conſtitution, which ſuppoſing that original Law, and being founded upon it, provides for the Neceſſities of our State, in a manner that is for the Glory of God, and for our Direction and Comfort.

What has been offer'd may help us to judge of the Author's manner of ſtating the Queſtion at the end of his 5th Chapter. He there pretends to tell us "what alone is the Point that "muſt decide the Queſtion, whether natural "and reveal'd Religion do really differ? As "for natural Religion (ſays he) that takes in "all thoſe Duties which flow from the Nature "and Reaſon of Things, and the Relations we "ſtand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures; "and conſequently was there an inſtituted Re-"ligion which differs from that of Nature, its "Precepts muſt be arbitrary, as not founded "on the Nature and Reaſon of Things, but de-"pending on meer Will and Pleaſure, other-"wiſe it wou'd be the ſame with natural Reli-"gion, p. 114." To the ſame Purpoſe he argues in his 7th Chapter, "that God can re-"quire nothing of his Creatures, but what "tends to their Good; and whatſoever is of "this Kind is a Superſtructure that belongs "to the Law of Nature, p. 69." And that "original Revelation comprehends every "thing

" thing that tends to the Honour of God and " the Good of Mankind, p. 70." But if by *natural Religion* and *original Revelation* he means (as he muſt if he ſpeaks to the Purpoſe) the original Law given to Mankind at the Beginning, he plainly begs the Thing in queſtion, when he ſuppoſes it to comprehend every thing that at any Time, and in any Circumſtance or Condition of Things ſhou'd be for the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind. This original Law did indeed comprehend whatever Divine Wiſdom ſaw neceſſary at the Time when it was given; but ſuppoſing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumſtances of Mankind, there may be ſome Things proper now, which were not then; and therefore there may be an *inſtituted Religion differing from that of Nature*, that is, differing in ſome reſpects from the original Religion of Nature, as it was at Man's firſt Creation, and yet *its Precepts not arbitrary*, if by that be meant *depending on meer unreaſonable Will and Pleaſure*, but founded on moſt juſt and wiſe Reaſons, admirably adapted to the preſent Condition and Circumſtances of Mankind.

The Sum is this: God's Will is always immutable and conſiſtent with it ſelf; yet this ſame invariable Will may produce different Conſtitutions according to the different Circumſtances his Creatures are in; the Invariableneſs of his Will proves, that one Revelation cannot be contrary to another, but not that he may not reveal at one Time, what he did not reveal, or not ſo fully reveal before; becauſe

becauſe ſome Things may be proper to be known or done in one State of Things, which were not ſo proper or neceſſary in another; *e. g.* There was no need of a Mediator, if Man had continued innocent, or of God's declaring how and upon what Terms he wou'd be reconcil'd to his guilty offending Creatures; and therefore theſe Things cou'd not properly make a Part of what the Author calls *original* Revelation; but on Suppoſition of Man's being fallen into a corrupt State, theſe Things might very properly make a Part of a ſubſequent Revelation. To repent of their Sins, to confeſs them humbly before God, to apply to him for Pardon, and to comply with whatever Terms God ſhou'd appoint in order to their Reconciliation and Acceptance; this cou'd not properly be any Part of the Religion of innocent Creatures, and yet muſt neceſſarily belong to the Religion of ſinful Creatures. On this Foot all the Additions Chriſtianity makes to the primitive original Law of Nature may well be accounted for. Suppoſing what this Author ſo often repeats, that God requires nothing of us, but what is ſuitable to the Relations between him and us, it may be ſhewn that Chriſtianity, with all its Precepts and peculiar Doctrines, is very well ſuited to the Relation between God, conſider'd as the wiſe and righteous Governor of the World, our offended but reconcilable Sovereign, and Man, conſider'd as his offending Creature, fallen into Sin.

It will perhaps be ſaid, that I ſuppoſe here that the human Nature is in a lapſed State, which

which the Author will not grant. But all that I ſuppoſe at preſent is, that Men are actually Sinners; and this is ſufficient to ſupport the Argument. But the Author has no Right to take it for granted, as he all along does in the preſent Queſtion, that the Condition and Circumſtances of the human Nature and of Mankind are exactly the ſame that it was from the Beginning; which is to take that for granted, which he knows is denied. 'Tis certain, that if we judge by all Appearances, the human Nature is now in a very degenerate State. The wiſeſt Men in all Ages, even amongſt the Heathens themſelves, have own'd and complain'd of it, and have puzzled themſelves to account how it came; and it ſeems moſt reaſonable and moſt for the Honour of God to ſuppoſe, that the Nature of Man was originally in a more ſound and healthful State than now it is. And ſuppoſing this (which at leaſt is a poſſible Suppoſition) here is a reaſonable Account to be given, why ſomething may be added to that original Law of Nature given to Man in the Beginning, ſuited to the Change in the Condition and Circumſtances of the human Nature.

But though the Author will not allow a Fall, as it has been commonly underſtood by Chriſtians, [his Objections againſt the Account given of it in Scripture ſhall be conſider'd afterwards] yet he muſt upon his own Hypotheſis allow a Fall in another ſenſe, that is, a Fall of moſt if not all Men from a State of Innocence to a State of actual Sin and Guilt. He

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ſuppoſes that Man was at firſt created Innocent, and that every Man is ſo ſtill; *capable of knowing and doing all that God requires.* He muſt alſo own (becauſe it is a Matter of Fact that cannot reaſonably be denied, and which indeed has been generally acknowledg'd in all Ages) that moſt if not all Men are actually Sinners when adult; that is, that they actually in ſome Inſtances or other tranſgreſs the Law of their Creation, which he repreſents as a *Law of unchangeable Purity* and *without Defect*; and conſequently he muſt ſuppoſe, that moſt if not all Men are actually fallen from the Innocence, in which he ſuppoſes they were all created, into a State of Guilt; and if ſo, here is a remarkable Change in their Circumſtances. Now I ask, in this Caſe, what Aſſurance can they have (if they be tried by that original Law which they are conſcious they have tranſgreſſed) of their being juſtified or rewarded? This Author tells us, that "God hath from "the Beginning given Mankind a Rule or Law "for their Conduct, by the Obſervance of "which they are acceptable to him, p. 3." This ſuppoſes that they cannot properly be juſtified by that Law or intitled to the Reward by Virtue of that Law, except they obſerve it.

If therefore they be conſcious to themſelves, that they have tranſgreſſed that Law, and fallen ſhort of the Obedience which they ought and might have yielded, they muſt found their Hope of Pardon and Acceptance not upon the original Law it ſelf, but upon ſomething diſtinct from it, and that is, the Mercy of the Law-

giver, diſpenſing with the Strictneſs of the original Law. And as to this the Author tells us, that "God's Mercy obliges him not to par-"don any further than his infinite Wiſdom ſees "fit, p. 41." And again, that "pardoning "as well as puniſhing are tranſient Acts, the "Effects of his Will, not Properties belonging "to his Nature." From whence it follows, that whatever Hopes we might have from a general Conſideration of the Divine Mercy, we cou'd not be abſolutely certain how far God will pardon thoſe that have tranſgreſs'd his Law, or reward an Obedience falling ſhort of what that Law requires and enjoins, except he himſelf is pleas'd to reveal it. And if God ſhou'd make a poſitive Declaration of his Will to this Purpoſe, and eſtabliſh a gracious Conſtitution in which he has engag'd to pardon thoſe that tranſgreſs his Law (though they have done it hainouſly and preſumptuouſly, and in repeated Inſtances) upon their Repentance, and to reward even their imperfect (if ſincere) Obedience with eternal Life; this is in the Nature of Things a Conſtitution diſtinct from and additional to the Law of our Creation, or that original Law given to Man at the Beginning, and of which we cannot have an abſolute Certainty meerly from the Reaſon and Nature of Things, as I ſhall more fully ſhew afterwards. And if he ſhou'd give an expreſs Revelation to this Purpoſe, and not meerly leave Men to general Hopes of his Mercy, it wou'd be an Inſtance of great Goodneſs in him, and which we ſhou'd be highly thankful for.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

That beſides the moral Precepts of the Original Law of Nature obligatory on all Mankind from the Beginning, God may ſee fit, for wiſe Reaſons, to appoint poſitive Precepts, and that theſe may anſwer very valuable Ends. And here an Occaſion is taken to vindicate the poſitive Precepts of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian Religion.

BEFORE I leave the preſent Queſtion, which is, whether any thing cou'd be added to that Law that was given to Mankind in the Beginning, it will be proper to conſider what the Author offers concerning poſitive Precepts; whether beſides Things that are evidently of a moral Nature, God can give any Precepts relating to Things, which abſolutely and in themſelves conſider'd, appear to us to be indifferent, and which, without an expreſs Command, we ſhou'd not think our ſelves oblig'd to obſerve; ſuch are all ritual Obſervances in Religion. For on Suppoſition that God ſhou'd at any Time give any Commands relating to Things of this Kind, or ſhou'd inſtitute any external Rites to be us'd in his

Worſhip, which were not appointed and inſtituted from the Beginning, here is an Inſtance in which ſome Additions may be made in Religion to what was originally appointed; and theſe Additions cou'd only be known by extraordinary Revelation, by which only we cou'd be aſſur'd that ſuch or ſuch Rites were of divine Appointment. Accordingly our Author, who wou'd have no Place left for any external Revelation at all, and who will have it that Religion was in all its Parts abſolutely immutable from the Beginning, incapable of the leaſt Addition, zealouſly contends that God cannot give any poſitive Precepts; yea he carries it ſo far as to charge it as Tyranny in God to lay any Injunctions of this Kind upon us; that the giving them is abſolutely inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, and the Happineſs of Mankind. On the Doctrine of poſitive Precepts he charges all the Superſtition that has obtain'd in the World. He frequently inſinuates, that no Religion can be true, or can come from God, which contains and requires any poſitive Precepts; from whence it follows, that ſince the Chriſtian Religion has ſome poſitive Precepts, and the Jewiſh had far more, neither the One nor the Other can be of Divine Original, or a true Divine Revelation. There is ſcarce any thing in his whole Book more labour'd than this Argument. It is the main Subject of three long Chapters, the ninth, tenth and eleventh, but there is ſcarce a Chapter in his Book that has not ſeveral Things that look this way; he returns to it on all Occaſions, which will make

make it the more neceſſary to conſider particularly what he offers on this Head; not for any Weight I apprehend to be in the Argument, but becauſe of the mighty Streſs our Author ſeems to lay upon it, and the unuſual Air of Confidence with which he advances it.

The Author's Scheme in this Part of it muſt be own'd to be new and extraordinary. 'Tis certain, that if we conſider the general Senſe of Nations in all Ages, they have always believ'd that God had a Power of injoining poſitive Precepts, and inſtituting religious Rites, becauſe they have generally believ'd that God has actually inſtituted ſome Things of this Kind, and have accordingly obſerv'd and regarded ſome ſuch Rites, as of Divine Appointment. Our Author will undoubtedly attribute this to Superſtition; and I freely own that they were often wrong in their Notion of the particular Rites which they ſuppos'd to be inſtituted by God; but that they were wrong in the Principle it ſelf, that God has a Right to inſtitute poſitive Rites in Religion, that this which ſeems to be a Principle of the Law of Nature it ſelf, for which we have the Conſent of Mankind, and which may therefore well paſs for a common Notion, is falſe, there need ſome very ſtrong Reaſons to convince us; and yet I find little more advanc'd againſt it than ſtrong and confident Aſſertions.

What makes it ſtranger in this Author to deny that God has this Power, is, that he allows this Right to Men themſelves; he ſeems to allow, that Things which have no Worth

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in themſelves, that is, Things which in themſelves are not morally good or evil, may yet be ſubſervient to Things truly excellent; but that theſe Things being of a mutable Nature, muſt be left to human Prudence. See p. 112, 115, 116, 431.

But ſurely if Men may make Appointments relating to ſuch Things as are antecedently of an indifferent Nature, and may prudently accommodate them to Circumſtances, God may do ſo too, and is certainly a much better Judge of what is proper, and accommodated to the Circumſtances of Mankind, than any Man can pretend to be; and to repreſent it as Tyranny in God to interpoſe in any ſuch Matters, is an inexcuſable Raſhneſs and Preſumption, and highly derogatory to his ſupreme Authority and Dominion.

'Tis undoubtedly true, that an infinitely wiſe and good Being never does any thing that is unfit and unreaſonable for him to do; but there may be very good Reaſons for his laying ſome Commands upon us in Things, which conſider'd abſolutely and in general are of an indifferent Nature, ſome of which I ſhall have occaſion to mention afterwards. But though in ſome Inſtances we ſhou'd not be able to aſſign the particular Reaſons of the Divine Injunctions, this wou'd be no Reaſon for our not obeying them.

He wou'd be juſtly eſteem'd a ſaucy Servant or Child, that ſhou'd declare to an earthly Parent, or Maſter, or Prince, I will not obey you in any Inſtance, except you tell me preciſely

ciſely why you command me to do it, and what are your particular Views in it, and your Reaſons for requiring it; and yet this ſeems to be the Conduct the Author preſcribes to be obſerv'd towards the ſupreme Governor of the World. We are not to obey him in any Inſtance, except he condeſcends to tell us preciſely what were his Reaſons for enjoining it, and except we our ſelves plainly ſee, that that particular Thing is for our own Intereſt; for he expreſly declares, that *God can require nothing of Men, but what they for their own Intereſt were oblig'd to do*, p. 359. but this ſeems to me to be contrary to what this Author ſo often ſpeaks of the Reaſon and Fitneſs of Things. As it is a Principle of eternal Truth, that a God of infinite Wiſdom and Juſtice and Goodneſs can never require an unjuſt Thing, ſo it is a neceſſary Obligation, founded on the very Nature of Things, that we are bound to obey whatever he in his infinite Wiſdom thinks fit to require; and when we have ſufficient Proofs that he lays any Commands upon us, we are indiſpenſably oblig'd, by the Law of our Creation, to obſerve thoſe Commands, though the Matter of them may ſeem indifferent to us, and we don't at preſent ſee the particular Reaſons of them. This is a juſt Reſpect due from ſuch dark imperfect Beings to the ſupreme Wiſdom and Authority, to the moſt wiſe and righteous Lord of the Univerſe; and therefore is a Duty of natural Religion, if we take the Author's own Definition of it, that it is the Senſe and Practice of thoſe Duties that reſult from the

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Knowledge we by our Reaſon have of God and his Perfections, and of our ſelves and our own Imperfections. And if we ſhou'd ſuppoſe that in ſome particular Inſtances God requir'd ſome Things of this Kind to *try us*, not as if he needed it for his own Information, which is the Turn this Author is pleas'd to give it, but to give us an Opportunity to exerciſe and manifeſt our intire Submiſſion to him, and Acknowledgment of his Sovereignty by obeying him in Things where a Regard to his Authority and Command is the ſole Reaſon of our Obedience; I can ſee nothing in this unworthy of the ſupreme Wiſdom and Goodneſs. For ſince Obedience in ſuch a Caſe, from an intire Reſignation to the divine Authority, is a worthy Diſpoſition in a reaſonable Creature towards the ſupreme univerſal Lord, it cannot be prov'd to be unbecoming a wiſe and good God to give ſome Commands, the particular Deſign of which may be to exerciſe and manifeſt that Diſpoſition.

Nor is there any Weight in what the Author offers againſt this, that "if earthly Kings, "who may be deceiv'd, and for the moſt "part are ſo, wou'd be juſtly eſteem'd Ty-"rants, if they require Things of their Sub-"jects, meerly to try their Obedience, how "can we think this of the omniſcient, infi-"nitely glorious King of Kings? p. 176." The Argument does not conclude in this Caſe from what is juſt and lawful in earthly Kings, to what is juſt and proper in the ſupreme univerſal Lord. Thus, *e. g.* an earthly King has no

no just Right to lay Afflictions upon us meerly to exercise and improve our Virtues, our Patience, Constancy, Submission, &c. yet all that acknowledge a Providence must own that God has this Right, and does exercise it, and that it is wise and fit for him to do so. And if he may send Afflictions and Chastisements upon us, which are real Evils in themselves, though in the final Issue to our Benefit, why may he not lay Commands upon us in Things which by the Supposition are indifferent, and consequently may be done or omitted without any real Prejudice to us? Why may he not appoint some Things of this Kind, that they may be on our Parts Acts of Homage, and outward publick Acknowledgments of God's Sovereign Dominion over us, and of our Subjection to him, in doing Things in Obedience to his Command, which otherwise we shou'd not have thought our selves oblig'd to do?

This Writer indeed tells us, that "the Law "of Nature leaves Men at Liberty to act as "they please in all indifferent Matters; and "if any traditionary Law abridges this Liber-"ty, so far 'tis contrary to that of Nature, "and invades those Rights which Nature and "its Author has given Mankind, p. 134." But certainly it is not any Part of that Liberty that belongs to the human Nature, that Men shall be freed in all indifferent Matters from the Dominion of God himself, their supreme and absolute Lord; nor did the Author of Nature ever so far tie his own Hands, as to oblige himself never to require any thing of this Kind; which

wou'd be indeed a diveſting himſelf of his own Sovereignty. Nor is it true that no human Legiſlators can give any Injunctions relating to Things which antecedently and in general are of an indifferent Nature. What are many of thoſe Uſages and Methods of Procedure and publick Forms which are ſettled in different Nations by human Laws, Things which in themſelves abſolutely conſider'd are indifferent, and have no intrinſick Goodneſs, and might have been appointed otherwiſe, and yet have their Uſe; and if human Laws may thus determine in civil Matters, why may not God appoint the Methods and Rites relating to his own Worſhip?

This Gentleman indeed ſeems to think, that God can't have ſuch a Power without a particular Contract between him and us; we muſt firſt give him this Power before he can exerciſe it. He has an odd Paſſage to this Purpoſe, p. 42. he tells us, that "the Jews being a free "People, had a Right by the Law of Nature "to chuſe what Government and Governor "they pleas'd; and God wou'd not act ſo in- "conſiſtent a Part, as to deprive them of any "of theſe Rights he had given them by the "Law of Nature; and therefore did not take "upon him the Civil Adminiſtration of their "Affairs, till he had obtain'd their expreſs "Conſent; ſo that here he acted not as Go- "vernor of the Univerſe, but by a Power de- "riv'd from the People by virtue of the *Ho-* "*reb* Covenant; and the Preſumption is, that "where there is no ſuch Contract, God will

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" not exercise such a Power; especially con-
" sidering that the Jews rejected God himself
" from reigning over them, and were for
" chusing a new King, yet he bids *Samuel*
" thrice in the same Chapter, to *hearken to*
" *the Voice of the People*, 1 Sam. viii. 4."
Again, p. 197, he says, that " God acted in
" giving Laws to the Jews, not as Governor
" of the Universe, but as King of the Jews,
" by virtue of the *Horeb* Covenant, which he
" obtain'd at his own Request.

This Gentleman here talks as if God had not a Right to lay any positive Injunctions upon the Jews, till they allow'd him to do so; as if he was oblig'd to request it of them, to grant him this Power, and cou'd not proceed till they had given it him; and as if by taking upon him the Character of the Ruler and Lord of *Israel*, he divested himself of that of Sovereign Lord of the Universe; that therefore when the Jews rejected him from being their King (as the Author tells us they did, and that God commanded *Samuel* to hearken to their Voice in it) they were free from the Obligation of those Laws; the contrary of all which is very evident. Some of their Rites were instituted before the *Horeb* Covenant, particularly the Passover, which was one of the most solemn of them all, and which was bound upon them by the express Authority of God himself, antecedently to the Contract this Author speaks of. And the Design of that Covenant was not (as he disingenuously represents it) to give God a Right to make Laws for them,

which he had an undoubted Right to do, whether they conſented to it or not; but as he deſign'd, for wiſe Reaſons, to take them into a ſpecial Relation to himſelf, as his peculiar People, (and this ſpecial Relation to them was no way inconſiſtent with the Relation and Character he ſuſtained, as the ſupreme Lord and Governor of the Univerſe, but ſubordinate to it) ſo it was highly proper that they ſhou'd, when thus ſeparated as a ſelect Body, openly declare their Reſolutions to walk in Obedience to the Divine Laws, and bind themſelves to do ſo by their own expreſs Conſent. But though God manifeſted a wonderful Condeſcenſion in his way of dealing with them, yet great Care was taken ſtill to preſerve and maintain the Regard due to his own ſupreme Majeſty. He did not ask their Conſent to the ſeveral particular Laws he enjoin'd, or demand their Approbation of them before he enjoin'd them, (as one wou'd think he ought to have done upon the Author's Scheme) as if this was neceſſary to ratify thoſe Laws, and give them their binding Force; but he all along enforces the Laws he gives them by his own Divine Authority, as having, by virtue of his own ſupreme Dominion, an abſolute uncontrolled Right to their Obedience; and therefore it is uſually ſubjoin'd to thoſe Laws, *I am the Lord* Jehovah, a Character belonging to him, as the ſupreme Lord of the Univerſe. And when they rejected him from being their King, (by which is meant no more than their rejecting that particular Form of Government by Judges, who were immediately

diately rais'd up by God to judge and govern the People) they did not intend to renounce the Dominion of God himself; they look'd upon themselves to be as much oblig'd as ever by the Laws and Rites of his Appointment, as they really were; and the Law of *Moses* was as much the Rule of their Government as before. As to what the Author subjoins, that *where there is no such Contract* (as between God and the *Israelites* at *Horeb*) *the Presumption is, that God will not exercise such a Power*; that is, a Power of instituting positive Laws and Rites; 'tis evident there is no need of a particular previous Contract to give God such a Power. His Government over us is not founded in our own Consent, as if we might refuse to subject our selves to him. He is necessarily, by an original antecedent unalienable Right, our supreme and absolute Sovereign and Lord; and we are, whether we will or no, his Creatures and Subjects; he therefore has an undoubted Right, without our previous Consent, to lay whatever Commands he in his infinite Wisdom thinks proper to lay upon us, and we are under indispensable Obligations to obey; and this particularly holds in Things relating to the Rites of his own Worship, which it is evident the Author has principally in view, in this whole Dispute concerning positive Precepts. It is so far from being true, that God has no Right to lay such Injunctions upon us, that there seems to be an evident Propriety in it, that God shou'd enjoin some Things of this Kind. Some external

nal Rites seem to be necessary in publick Worship in this present State, and nothing can be more reasonable than that God shou'd have the appointing them, as being the propereſt Judge of what is fit and decent in his own Worship; and becauſe to leave it at large to human Invention is to leave a wide Door open for all manner of Superſtition. And when once God has appointed ſuch Rites, and ſtamp'd a Uſe and Significancy upon them, whether as ſolemn external Acts and Expreſſions of Homage and Adoration to him, or as Memorials of paſt Benefits, or outward Repreſentations of ſpiritual Bleſſings, or as viſible Pledges of his Favour to us, and viſible outward Tokens of our Conſent and Engagements to be his, whereby we bind our ſelves in a ſolemn manner to Obedience; they may be highly uſeful to the moſt excellent Purpoſes of Religion; and ſo though they have no abſolute Goodneſs in their own Nature antecedently to the Divine Inſtitution, may, when once inſtituted for ſuch Purpoſes by God himſelf, be uſeful to excite and ſtrengthen good Affections and Diſpoſitions in our Minds, and to bind us more firmly to our Duty, or to the Practice of Things that are really and in their own Nature excellent.

But ſays the Author, "Was there any Rea-
"ſon to deprive Men of their Liberty in in-
"different Things, they wou'd then ceaſe to
"be indifferent, p. 135." And is then the whole Deſign of all this Gentleman's long and labour'd Harangue on this Subject only to

prove,

prove, that God will not require any thing, except he has a Reason for requiring it? This will be easily granted. And if his having a Reason for requiring Things, will prove that they are not indifferent, then there are no indifferent Things either in the Jewish or Christian Religion: For to be sure God had a Reason from his own Wisdom for enjoining them, or he wou'd not have enjoin'd them; and so all the mighty Noise he makes about positive, or as he calls them, arbitrary Precepts, and the boasted Argument he raises from thence against Revelation, falls to the Ground.

We may even at this Distance assign the Reasons of many of the positive Rites and Injunctions in the Law of *Moses*; many of them were evidently design'd to keep them a separate People, that they might not easily mingle with other Nations, and be infected with their vicious Customs; others of them were design'd as Commemorations of past Benefits and Deliverances; others of them as Types and Prefigurations of future ones, especially the Redemption by the *Messiah*, which as it was the principal Subject of the Prophecies, so it was very proper there shou'd be many Things in that Religion to typify and prefigure it, especially considering that the Jewish Religion was design'd to be introductive to that more perfect Dispensation, which the *Messiah* was to establish; and by comparing the one with the other, the great Extent of the Divine Wisdom does appear. It may be further said, that as the Jews were extremely fond of the Heathen

Rites,

Rites, and apt to be ſeduc'd with the Pomp and Show of their Worſhip, ſo it pleas'd God, in Condeſcenſion to their Weakneſs, to inſtitute a Religion that had pompous Rites and Ceremonies and a magnificent Temple, the more effectually to preſerve them from Idolatry, and keep them cloſe to the Worſhip and Service of the true God. Add to all this, that many of the Jewiſh Cuſtoms and Precepts properly belong'd to them as a Commonwealth, and were appointed with very wiſe political Views; and when we plainly find ſome of them wiſely order'd, we may juſtly ſuppoſe there were equally wiſe Reaſons for the reſt; and that they were all admirably fitted to that People and that Diſpenſation. Does not the Author himſelf lay it down as a Rule, that "'tis the Cir-"cumſtances Men are under by which we are "to judge of the Tendency of Actions? p. 345. And again, "Should not Rules (ſays he) "concerning Morality be ſuited to Men's par-"ticular Circumſtances, *&c.* is not this the "Deſign of the municipal Laws of every "Country? p. 344." I ask therefore, ſuppoſing God gave any Laws to the Jews at all, ſhould they not be ſuited to their particular Circumſtances? Was not this the Part of a wiſe Legiſlator? If therefore, as they were circumſtanc'd, thoſe Laws tended to their Benefit, to preſerve them from the Pollutions of the Heathens, and keep them cloſe to the Worſhip of the true God, if they were admirably adapted to the particular State and Circumſtances of that People and Polity, then they

they were just and good, even by our Author's own Rule, and wisely contriv'd; and it wou'd be an inexcusable Rashness at this Distance to pronounce a hasty Censure upon Laws, of which we do not know the Occasions and Circumstances, which might make them proper and even necessary at that Time, and for that People. But because there are some of the Jewish Rites, which the Author particularly endeavours to expose as absurd and unworthy of God, particularly Circumcision and Sacrifices, I shall take this Occasion to consider what he offers concerning them, that I may not return again to this Subject.

Circumcision he represents as a cruel Rite, not to be perform'd *without extreme Danger as well as Anguish*, and which therefore cou'd not reasonably be suppos'd a *religious Duty, acceptable to a good and gracious God*, p. 90. One wou'd think, by his way of representing it, that the Children every time they were circumcis'd run the utmost Hazard of their Lives, and that great Numbers of 'em died of it, which we don't find to have been the Case either formerly or now, or that it was of any Inconvenience to their bodily Health or Strength; nor did the Jews themselves make any such Complaints of it as this Gentleman makes for them; instead of esteeming it so cruel a Hardship, they counted it their Priviledge and Glory. The general Design of Circumcision was to separate them to God, as a People in a peculiar manner devoted to him, and from whom the *Messiah* was to spring. God so order'd it, that they

might carry about them in their Bodies a conſtant Memorial of their Obligations. Nor can it be prov'd, that God cannot, when it is for valuable Ends, require any thing that may occaſion ſome preſent Trouble and Uneaſineſs in the Fleſh; and this particular Rite ſeems to be fix'd upon for this End, among others, to remind them of the Obligation they were under to mortify the Fleſh with its corrupt Affections and Luſts, to put off the old Man with his Deeds, (to uſe the Apoſtle's Expreſſions) and ſubdue their ſinful Appetites and Paſſions; a Work ungrateful to corrupt Nature, and which yet muſt be perform'd, though it may coſt Pain and Trouble to do it. It is evident from many Paſſages in the Old Teſtament, that the outward Circumciſion was principally deſign'd to lead their Thoughts to that Circumciſion of the Heart, as it is call'd; and they are often put in mind, that the former wou'd be of no avail to their Acceptance to God without the latter. See for this Purpoſe *Deut.* 10. 16. *Deut.* 30. 6. *Jer.* 4. 4. *Rom.* 2.

Our Author alſo finds fault with Sacrifices, which he repreſents as a very abſurd and ſenſeleſs Superſtition, "as if God was of ſo cruel a "Nature, as to be delighted with the butchering of innocent Animals, and that the Stench "of Burnt-fleſh ſhou'd be ſuch a ſweet-ſmelling "Savour in his Noſtrils, as to attone for the "Wickedneſs of Men; and wicked no doubt "they were, when they had ſuch an Attonement at hand." He reſolves the Original of

of Sacrifices into the Artifices of the Priests, "who shar'd with their Gods, and reserv'd the "best Bits for themselves," and taught the People, that "it was necessary some Part of "the Flesh of Animals was to be burnt to feed "the hungry Nostrils of the Deity, delight-"ed with the sweet Savour of burnt Flesh, p. "91, 92.

It wou'd indeed be a very senseless Superstition, if it were as this Writer thinks fit to represent it. But may not a juster Account be given of the End and Design of Sacrifices? If Men can without Cruelty (as I suppose our Author will easily grant, since he makes himself so merry with those that scruple eating Blood) *butcher innocent Animals* for their own Use, I see not how it cou'd be suppos'd a Cruelty in God (as this Gentleman insinuates) to require that Animals shou'd be offer'd as a publick Act of Homage, or Rite of Acknowledgment to the great Ruler of the World, whereby Men publickly recogniz'd his absolute Dominion over them, and Propriety in them and theirs, devoting a Part to him to whose Bounty they ow'd their all. The Author indeed calls this an *ungrateful throwing back the Gifts of God upon the Donor*, p. 91. and I wou'd fain know what other way we have of serving God, but to give him of his own? This Gentleman talks, as if we cou'd never be said to worship God acceptably, except we cou'd lay an Obligation on him, by giving him something which he had not before.

As to the Sacrifices of Expiation, they were deſign'd to put Men in mind, by the ſlaughtering of the Victim, of the Death and Puniſhment they themſelves had incurr'd and deſerv'd by their Sins, and to keep alive upon their Minds a Senſe of the Divine Juſtice, and at the ſame Time to be a viſible Pledge of his Mercy and Willingneſs to be reconcil'd. And accordingly the Sacrifices amongſt the Jews were to be accompanied with Prayer and Confeſſion of their Sins; ſo that by this Rite they publickly acknowledg'd their own Guilt and Demerit, the Senſe they had of the Divine Juſtice, and at the ſame Time their Hope and Confidence in the Divine Mercy. And it is to be conſider'd further, that the Scripture teaches us to regard theſe Sacrifices as the Pledges, the Types and Prefigurations of that great Attonement and Propitiation that was to be offer'd in the Fulneſs of Time for the Sins of the World. And on Suppoſition that there was a Saviour promis'd from the Beginning, who was to ſuffer and die for our Sins, and yet for wiſe Reaſons was not actually to appear till many Ages after, why might it not be agreeable to the Divine Wiſdom to inſtitute Sacrifices to continue till his Coming, the better to preſerve upon Men's Minds a Senſe of God's Juſtice and Mercy too, and of the Neceſſity of an Attonement or Propitiation for Sin?

From this Account of the Uſe and Deſign of Sacrifices, it does not appear to be ſo fooliſh a Rite as this Gentleman pretends; the Abſurdity of which ariſes wholly from the groſs and

courſe

course Ideas under which he chuses to represent it, as if Sacrifices were offer'd only to *feed the hungry Nostrils of the Deity, delighted with the Savour of burnt Flesh.* It was impossible for the Jews to entertain such a Notion, if they govern'd themselves by the Sacred Writings, which every where abound with the most noble and sublime Descriptions of the Deity, his Spirituality, Immensity, All-sufficiency, *&c.* Besides which there are many express and formal Passages, design'd as it were on purpose to prevent such gross Conceptions. Nothing can be fuller to this Purpose than the 50th Psalm, *v.* 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. *Is.* 1. 11, 12, 13. Effectual Care is taken to prevent their imagining that any of these Things were, in themselves consider'd, and by any Virtue of their own, sufficient to recommend them to God, and expiate the Guilt of Sin. See further to this Purpose, *Ps.* 40. 6. 51. 16, 19. *Prov.* 15. 8. *Jer.* 6. 19, 20, *Amos* 5. 22. It appears therefore, that there was nothing in the Institution of Sacrifices to encourage Sin, as if they might be *as wicked as they pleas'd, having such an Attonement at hand,* as this Writer intimates. They were sufficiently inform'd, that these Sacrifices wou'd be of no avail without Repentance and new Obedience, though to the sincere and truly penitent they were the visible Pledges of God's pardoning Mercy.

As to the positive Rites of Christianity they are few and simple, of noble Use and Significancy, and easily accounted for. Baptism is a

sacred

ſacred Rite, whereby Perſons are ſolemnly dedicated and devoted to God, and viſibly entred among Chriſt's Diſciples, and brought under Engagements to Obedience. It is a very proper Symbol to repreſent that inward Purity that is requir'd of all Chriſt's ſincere Diſciples, and to be a Repreſentation and Pledge of that Pardon of Sins that ſhall be conferr'd upon them. Finally, it is deſign'd to bind us to the Obſervation of the Chriſtian Covenant, and conſequently if the Duties of that Covenant are unqueſtionably pure and excellent, as they certainly are, then this Rite, inſtead of diverting us from Morality, has an excellent Tendency to promote the Practice of Righteouſneſs. The ſame may be ſaid of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is deſign'd for a Confirmation of the Chriſtian Covenant; and beſides this has a particular Reference to the Sufferings and Death of Chriſt, of which it is a Commemoration. And ſuppoſing what the Scriptures relate concerning Chriſt to be true, that he is the great Saviour of the World, and that he ſuffer'd and died to obtain eternal Redemption for us; ſuppoſing, I ſay, this to be true, (and it muſt be ſuppos'd in the preſent Queſtion, when we are judging of the Reaſonableneſs of ſuch an Inſtitution) then certainly it might be very agreeable to the Divine Wiſdom to appoint a ſacred Rite, the particular Deſign of which was to keep up the grateful lively Remembrance of ſuch glorious Benefits, and to ſtir up the warm Emotions of Love to God and the Redeemer in our Hearts.

And

And to suppose that the instituting only such Rites as these, which at least are harmless but are really beneficial, shou'd have such a strange Effect, as to render all other Things that can be said for Christianity ineffectual, is contrary to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. For if the other Proofs brought for the Christian Religion be true, the having such positive Rites cannot alone ever prove it to be false.

Our Author indeed affirms, that "there's "nothing of a mutable Nature, if once e-"steem'd immutably fix'd by God, but must "sometimes prove prejudicial to the End "'twas intended to promote, especially in a "Religion design'd to extend over the World, "as well as to last to the End of it, p. 109." But I don't see any thing in the Nature of the Christian Sacraments, but what may be generally and perpetually observ'd; nor that they can ever become prejudicial to the Ends for which they were appointed, whilst Men observe them in the Manner and for the Purposes for which they were originally instituted; and if they do not, the Fault is not in the Institutions themselves, but in those that do not keep close to the Divine Appointment. Indeed the Jewish Ceremonies were many of them of such a Nature, that they cou'd not be generally and perpetually observ'd; and accordingly it is plain they were never design'd by God for universal Observation, nor to be continued throughout all Ages; as appears in that they were particularly accommodated to that Time and Nation, and were for the most part by their original

nal Inſtitution confin'd to the Land of *Canaan*, and to the Tabernacle or Temple there. And we may be ſure a wiſe and good God will take care not to eſtabliſh any poſitive Inſtitutions by a perpetual Law or Conſtitution, but what may be perpetually obſerv'd.

It might be thought unneceſſary to add any thing further on this Subject of poſitive Precepts; but becauſe it is a Point the Author labours with great Art, I ſhall add ſome further Remarks upon what he offers on this Head.

And one Remark I wou'd make is this; that many of his Arguments are nothing elſe but a plain begging of the Queſtion; as when he often repeats it, that *Things good and evil* (that is, Things which are morally ſo) *are the only Things which God can command or forbid, or to which the Commands of a Being of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs can extend*; and when he talks with ſo much Pomp of the *eternal Reaſon and Nature of Things*, and that this is *the Foundation and Meaſure of God's Dominion*, and thence infers, that nothing can be a Divine Law, but what is obligatory from the very Nature of the Thing; what is all this, which is the Subſtance of what he advances on this Subject in his laſt Chapter, but poorly to beg the Queſtion, and take for granted the Thing which is in Debate? Even with reſpect to Things in their own Nature obligatory, though they may be fit and reaſonable in themſelves, yet that which properly makes them a Divine Law, is the Authority

of

of God the ſupreme Legiſlator; and therefore if there were no Deity, there cou'd be no Divine Law; and this Authority of God may bind ſome Things upon us, which of themſelves, and without ſuch a Command, wou'd not be obligatory. Nor does the Author prove the contrary, except we muſt take ſtrong Aſſertions for Proofs. He has indeed a great deal to ſhew, that God cannot act contrary to the eternal Reaſon and Nature of Things, or to the Relations between him and us, but he never proves, that it is contrary to the Reaſon of Things, or to the Relation between God, conſider'd as the ſupreme Lord and Governor of the World, and us as his Creatures and Subjects, for God to require Things of a poſitive Nature; on the contrary it is eaſy to ſhew, that his Right to require ſuch Things, and our Obligation to obey them, is founded in the very Nature and Reaſon of Things, (to uſe the Author's Expreſſions) or neceſſarily reſults from the Relations between God and us. When this Writer tells us, that "the Reaſon of Things "and the Divine Commands are inſeparable, "but that it is the Fitneſs of Things which "makes it a Divine Law, p. 357." If he ſpeaks of a moral Fitneſs, and deſigns to ſignify that nothing but what is in its own Nature morally good can be a Divine Law, this is the very Point he ought to prove, and not (as in this and many other Paſſages) ſecurely take it for granted. But if all the Meaning of ſuch Aſſertions as theſe be only, that God commands nothing but what he himſelf has juſt and

wiſe Reaſons for commanding, and requires nothing but what he ſees to be fit and reaſonable for him to require; I own it, but then it may be fit and reaſonable, on many accounts, for him to require ſome Things, which taken in general and abſtractedly, ſeem to be of an indifferent Nature.

The Author indeed in this whole Diſpute concerning poſitive Precepts, all along confounds *poſitive* and *arbitrary* Precepts; and by arbitrary Precepts he means Precepts for which there is no Reaſon at all. He repreſents all thoſe that hold there are any poſitive Divine Precepts in Religion, as maintaining that God acts by *meer Will and Arbitrarineſs*, that is, by meer unreaſonable Will and Pleaſure, without any valuable End or Reaſon, and that he gives *arbitrary Laws*, that is, Laws which he has no Reaſon for giving; but this is very unfair; we freely acknowledge, that he never does or requires any thing but what his own infinite Wiſdom ſees it fit and reaſonable for him to do and to require, and that he always does that which, all Circumſtances conſider'd, is beſt upon the whole and fitteſt to be done; and when he gives poſitive Precepts, it is becauſe as Matters are circumſtanc'd, he ſees it fit and proper to do ſo, of which certainly he is the beſt Judge. And therefore the greateſt Part of the Author's reaſoning on this Subject is intirely loſt and impertinent, which proceeds upon the Suppoſition, that there is no Reaſon at all for laying ſuch poſitive Injunctions upon us; that they have

have *no relation at all to the Honour of God, and to the Good of Mankind*; that they are meer *uſeleſs Obſervances*. But this is what he ought to prove, that Things which in general and antecedently are indifferent, can never be of any Uſe, or anſwer any valuable Purpoſes, or be ſubſervient to the promoting Things which are in their own Nature excellent: The contrary to which has been ſhewn.

When he argues, that "whatſoever is in "it ſelf indifferent, muſt be ſo to an all-wiſe "God, who judges of Things as they are, p. 122. And that "Things which are of no "Value in themſelves, can be no Motives to "an all-wiſe Being to reward or puniſh his "Children, p. 115, 122." It is eaſy to reply, that Things which in general and abſtractedly conſider'd are of no Value, and have no abſolute Goodneſs of their own, may yet be ſo circumſtanc'd, that conſider'd in the Manner and for the Ends for which they are injoin'd, they may be highly uſeful; and the injoining them may in ſuch Caſes anſwer many valuable Ends, and then ſuppoſing that a wiſe God ſees it proper to injoin them, he may juſtly puniſh the Neglect of them. For the not obſerving them when he requires it, is really an Immorality, and argues a Contempt of the Divine Wiſdom and Authority, and is therefore juſtly puniſhable; and the obſerving theſe Things in the Manner and for the Ends for which God requires them, when done in Obedience to his Authority, and from a hearty Reſignation to his Wiſdom and Sovereignty,

may be an acceptable Act of Obedience, and argue an excellent Diſpoſition of Mind, and as ſuch may be rewardable. But as to the Caſe he puts of a Perſon's obſerving *the whole Law of Nature*, and yet being *puniſh'd eternally for not obſerving ſuch Things as theſe*, p. 125. This is an extravagant Suppoſition, that ought not to be made. Nobody pretends that poſitive Rites are obligatory on thoſe, to whom they never were made known. And it can never be ſuppos'd, that a Man that obſerves the whole Law of Nature, and who therefore muſt be ſuppos'd to have the profoundeſt Submiſſion and Veneration for the Deity, will refuſe to obſerve a poſitive Rite, on Suppoſition that he knows that God requires it.

Our Author frequently repreſents poſitive Precepts as a grievous and inſupportable Yoke, and declaims pathetically on this Subject. He tells us, that " the whole of human Liberty " conſiſts in Men's acting as they think fit in " indifferent Matters, where no one is injur'd; and that " Men's Happineſs depends on their " Liberty in all ſuch Things; and that Men " are more or leſs miſerable, according as they " are more or leſs depriv'd of this Liberty, eſpe- " cially in Matters of Religion, wherein they " ought to be moſt free, p. 134, 135." I muſt own I think it a very odd Account which this Gentleman here gives of human Happineſs, that it depends wholly upon their Liberty in indifferent Things, that is, upon their Liberty of doing or omitting Things which according to his Notion are good for nothing, and if done

or

or omitted are of no Service at all. But to paſs this by, it will be eaſily allow'd, that Men ought to be free in Matters of Religion; but this Freedom of Men in Matters of Religion does not ſignify that they muſt be abſolutely free from the Injunctions of God himſelf. We may then be ſaid to be free in Religion, when we are at Liberty to ſerve God and to obey his Injunctions freely according to our Conſciences, without the Conſtraint of human Impoſitions. But the Freedom he refers to, that is, Men's being left wholly to themſelves, without any Divine Direction or Appointment in religious Rites of Worſhip, wou'd be far from being an Advantage in the preſent State of Mankind. But he charges his Adverſaries with ſuppoſing, "that God, who had the Goodneſs "for a long Time not to confine Mankind to "any indifferent Things, yet at length chang'd "his Mind, and repented of this great Goodneſs, "and arbitrarily depriv'd, they will not ſay all "Mankind, but no ſmall Number of their Li-"berty, and requir'd of them the Belief of "certain uſeleſs Speculations, and the Practice "of certain indifferent Things, under the ſe-"vereſt Penalties, p. 131." As to what he calls *uſeleſs Speculations*, there are no ſuch Things in the Chriſtian Religion; all the Articles we are requir'd to believe, are noble and excellent in their Tendency, and have a happy Influence, where they are firmly believ'd and ſeriouſly conſider'd, to excite and confirm good Diſpoſitions in us. But to paſs this by at preſent, I obſerve that this Gentleman takes

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it for granted here, as in ſeveral other Paſſages, particularly p. 115. that the Law of Nature from the Beginning, and for many Ages, was without any poſitive Rites at all; which is to take for granted a Thing which he knows is denied; ſince all that own the Authority of the Scriptures, muſt believe that there were poſitive Rites, of Divine Appointment, from the Beginning. Nor can any Time be aſſign'd when the Religion of Mankind was abſolutely without any poſitive Rites at all. Never was there any Nation that had any publick Worſhip, but what had alſo ſome poſitive Rites in their Religion, which they receiv'd, or believ'd they receiv'd from God; ſo that in this the Author has the Senſe of all Mankind againſt him. But ſuppoſing there had been a Time when there were no poſitive Precepts requir'd at all, wou'd this prove that there cou'd never be any requir'd or inſtituted afterward? Can God never alter his Methods of Proceeding towards Mankind, when the Change in their Circumſtances makes ſuch an Alteration proper? Cannot he accommodate his Laws and Injunctions to their Circumſtances (which by the Author's own Acknowledgment is an Inſtance of great Goodneſs, yea and of Wiſdom too) but he muſt be charg'd with *changing his Mind, and repenting of his Goodneſs*? Suppoſing that God ſaw it neceſſary even for preſerving the greater Matters of Religion, for maintaining his Worſhip, for reſtraining Men from Idolatry, to inſtitute outward Rites and Ceremonies, which were not inſtituted before,

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wou'd this in such Circumstances be any Want of Goodness, and not rather a remarkable Instance of his gracious Condescension for their Benefit? Or wou'd it be a greater Goodness in God to leave Men wholly to their own Inventions and Imaginations in appointing religious Rites (the sad Effects of which so visibly appear'd in the Heathen World) than himself to prescribe the Rites of his own Worship? What this Author so tragically represents as an *arbitrarily depriving Men of their Liberty* is in other Words only instituting sacred Rites for the valuable Purposes of Religion, and instead of being a Hardship upon them is a signal Advantage. Thus it was a great Advantage to the Jews to have sacred Rites of God's own Appointment: These Rites, however burdensome they might seem, were very useful to them as they were circumstanc'd, and tended to keep them free from the Idolatries of the Heathens, and the many barbarous, impure, and cruel Rites of their Worship. And as to Christians, the positive Rites requir'd in the Gospel are so few, so eaſy of Observation, so comfortable and beneficial in their Tendency, that whatever this Gentleman thinks, the best of Christians have been so far from regarding them as a grievous Yoke, that they have ever esteem'd it their great Priviledge to observe them, and have been very thankful for them, and wou'd not be without the Satisfaction they yield. Upon the whole, if God is pleas'd to direct us in the Rites of his own Worship, and if, in Condescension to our Infirmities, he

he inſtitutes ſome outward ſenſible Signs, to be the Symbols of ſpiritual Benefits, and the viſible Pledges of his Favour, and to be Helps for exciting good Affections in us; this, inſtead of being complain'd of as a Hardſhip, ſhou'd be acknowledg'd as a Benefit, and inſtead of charging him with Tyranny, we ſhou'd admire his Condeſcenſion and Goodneſs.

The Author ſeems aware of this, and objects to himſelf, p. 172. that "ſenſible Things "make a deeper Impreſſion on the Minds of "the common People than Words, and "therefore the uſing ſymbolical Repreſenta-"tions being for the advantage of Religion, "why may they not be ordain'd of God?" He anſwers, that "if we muſt have recourſe "to Words to explain the Signification of "ſuch Symbols, 'tis plain they are arbitra-"ry Marks, and not being capable of ex-"preſſing Things more fully than Words, "are wholly needleſs, Words themſelves be-"ing but arbitrary Signs, to multiply ſuch "Signs needleſly wou'd be very abſurd.

This Argument of the Author's tends equally to prove, that all Symbols in political or civil Matters are abſurd, and ſo arraigns the Wiſdom and the Cuſtoms of all Nations; why ſhou'd a Seal be added to confirm a Writing, ſince it is an arbitrary Mark, and not being able to expreſs Things more fully than Words, is wholly needleſs? But notwithſtanding what this Gentleman offers, it can't be denied, that ſenſible Signs, or ſymbolical Repreſentations,

ſentations, accompanied with Words, often make a much ſtronger Impreſſion than Words alone wou'd do, and tend more to ſtrike and affect the Mind, and excite more lively Images; and this being ſo, why may it not be agreeable to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to accommodate himſelf to the human Nature by inſtituting ſome ſuch ſymbolical Rites?

But he urges, p. 173. that "as to ſenſible "Things making a deeper Impreſſion on the "common People, that is a juſt Reaſon againſt "their Uſe in Religion; becauſe the Vulgar, "who generally look no further than Exter-"nals, conceive in them I know not what "internal Holineſs, and think ſuch ſymbolical "Repreſentations as neceſſary as the Things "repreſented by them." He adds, that "the "chief Cauſe of the *Egyptians* falling into "groſſer Idolatries than other leſs knowing "Nations, was owing to the Uſe of Hiero-"glyphicks in their religious Worſhip; and "that the Popiſh Idolatry was introduc'd un-"der Pretence of ſenſible Repreſentations to "excite People's Devotions.

But ſince Men are ſo fond of ſymbolical Repreſentations which have obtain'd more or leſs in all Nations, and ſince they have ſo great a Tendency to work upon us in this preſent State, this ſhews how much adapted this way is to the Nature of Man; and therefore it is an Inſtance of great Goodneſs in God, that he hath appointed ſome Things of this Kind to be us'd in his Worſhip. And indeed the moſt effectual way that cou'd be ſuppos'd, to prevent

the wrong Uſe that might be made of theſe Things, was for God to take the appointing of them into his own Hands. And if Men had kept cloſe to his Appointment, if they had adher'd to the Simplicity of the Divine Inſtitutions, there wou'd have been no Danger of Idolatry; no Miſchief, but a great deal of Comfort and Advantage wou'd have flow'd from thoſe ſymbolical Repreſentations.

Our Author indeed argues, that if any poſitive things be admitted at all, it will endanger Religion. "For if People are once brought "to believe they are good for any thing, they "will be apt to believe they are good for all "Things, p. 141. And to lay a greater Streſs "upon them than their Nature will bear, they "will think, by the Obſervance of ſuch "Things as theſe, to compound with Heaven "for Immoralities. Nothing therefore can be "of worſe Conſequence than to depreciate "Morality, by mixing Things of an indiffe-"rent Nature with it, p. 150." He frequently intimates, that the Original of all Superſtition is the ſuppoſing any poſitive Rites of Divine Inſtitution in Religion. He charges this alſo as the unhappy Source of all thoſe Contentions, Perſecutions, endleſs Quarrels about indifferent Things, which have diſturb'd the World in all Ages. He declaims largely on this Subject in his tenth and eleventh Chapters.

It will eaſily be granted, that People have often made a very wrong Uſe of poſitive Things; many have thought, by ritual Obſervances,

vances, to compound for Immoralities. And have not many alſo ſuppos'd, that by the Obſervance of one moral Precept, ſuch as Charity to the Poor, they might compound for the Violation of others equally neceſſary? But does this prove, that therefore that moral Precept ought not to have been given? Many have been apt to place a great Part of their Religion in outward Forms and Rites, and many Quarrels and Contentions there have been about ſuch Things as theſe. But what Method does this Gentleman propoſe to hinder it? It is to leave all outward Matters relating to Religion and divine Worſhip wholly to human Diſcretion. He tells us, that "it is neceſſary that "the People ſhou'd be left at Liberty to chuſe "thoſe means, that their Reaſon tells them "may be moſt proper for obtaining the End, p. 112. And that "human Diſcretion is left "at Liberty in theſe Things, to judge what "is fit or not fit to be obſerv'd, p. 113." He concludes therefore, that "God has left the "Parties concern'd to act in all Places accor-"ding to Diſcretion in ſuch mutable Matters, p. 110. And it is the Title of his 10th Chapter, that "God leaves thoſe Things that can "only be conſider'd as Means (and as ſuch "are in their own Nature mutable) to human "Diſcretion, to determine as it thinks moſt "conducing to thoſe Things which are in their "own Nature obligatory.

This then is the Method he preſcribes for deſtroying Superſtition, to leave Mankind wholly to their own Diſcretion, in Matters relating

to Divine Worſhip. But if we muſt judge by Fact, this Method is not very proper to anſwer the Intention. What Effect had the Prudence and Diſcretion of the Heathen Law-givers, Men admir'd for their Wiſdom? Was it not to eſtabliſh a Multitude of idolatrous Rites, that deſtroy'd the Purity of Religion? Can a People be nam'd who have not fallen into the moſt abſurd Superſtitions, when left meerly to their own Diſcretion, without the Guidance of Divine Revelation in Matters of Religion? This Author himſelf owns, that it is the Voice of Nature that God muſt be publickly worſhipped, but he wou'd have the appointing all the Rites of the Divine Worſhip left to Men themſelves. Let us ſuppoſe then, that they ſhou'd think proper to make uſe of ſymbolical Rites in Divine Worſhip, (and 'tis certain in Fact, that this has been the general Sentiment of Mankind in all Ages) all the Miſchiefs he complains of wou'd follow; they wou'd by Uſe become ſacred and venerable; the People wou'd contract a ſuperſtitious Veneration for them, as they uſually have for the Traditions of their Fathers; they wou'd be apt to place Religion in them; add to this, that they wou'd be in much greater Danger on ſuch a Suppoſition of running into Idolatry, than if they were confin'd to the Rites of God's own Appointment. And as human Fancy and Imagination is very fruitful, they would multiply ſuch Rites, till they *ſwell'd to that Bulk* (to uſe the Author's Expreſſions) *as to oppreſs*

and

and ſtifle true Religion by their Number and Weight.

The beſt Remedy that can be propos'd againſt theſe Miſchiefs, is for God to appoint the Rites of his own Worſhip, and for Men to adhere cloſely to the Divine Inſtitutions. And if they govern'd themſelves by the Word of God, uſing thoſe Rites that are there inſtituted, and for thoſe Purpoſes for which they are there appointed, Superſtition wou'd be effectually prevented. They might in that Caſe think ſuch poſitive Inſtitutions *good for ſomething*, viz. for the Purpoſes for which they were inſtituted, and yet would not think them *good for all Things*, or that they can compound for Immoralities.

The Jewiſh Religion had a great Variety of Rites and Ceremonies; but it appears from many Paſſages in the Sacred Writings, that great Care was taken to prevent the People's imagining that all Religion conſiſted in theſe Things, or that the meer outward Performance of them wou'd be ſufficient to recommend them to the Divine Favour. And as to the New Teſtament, this Writer himſelf acknowledges, and endeavours to ſhew, p. 429, 430. that it every where inculcates the abſolute Neceſſity of Righteouſneſs and moral Goodneſs, without which no ceremonious Obſervances will be of any avail to our Acceptance with God.

But though the whole or principal Part of Religion does not conſiſt in theſe Things, it does not follow, that they cannot be admitted

ted into Religion at all, or make any Part of it. For on Suppoſition that God requires them, to obſerve them in Obedience to his Authority, even though we did not diſtinctly ſee the Reaſon of them (which yet is not the Caſe, with reſpect to the poſitive Rites of Chriſtianity, the Reaſons and Uſes of which are obvious and excellent) wou'd argue good Diſpoſitions, and might be counted very properly an Act of Religion, if Obedience to God be ſo. And he that does this, acts a reaſonable Part. Superſtition does not conſiſt in obſerving the Rites which God hath injoin'd, and in the Manner and for the Purpoſes for which he hath injoin'd them; nor was any Man ever ſuperſtitious by keeping cloſe to the Divine Inſtitutions, and by laying that Streſs upon them which he directs us in his Word to lay upon them. Religion does indeed (as this Gentleman frequently tells us) *conſiſt in imitating the Perfections of God*, and he thinks that to obſerve any ſuch poſitive Rites is not *to imitate any of the Divine Perfections*, p. 123. but then this alone is not an adequate Notion of Religion; it conſiſts alſo in obeying his Commands, in a Subjection to his Authority, and in a Reſignation to his Will, and in an Obſervance of whatſoever he is pleas'd to appoint. We muſt not, under Pretence of being like God, and imitating his Perfections, pretend like him to be free from the Injunctions of any Superior.

It ſeems very plauſible, and for the Honour of God and Religion, to ſay, " there

" is

" is nothing in a Religion that comes from " God, but what is moſt excellent." But if he means by *moſt excellent*, what is of a moral Nature, and has in it ſelf the higheſt Degree of internal Excellency, this is to take for granted what he ought to prove. There may be Things in Religion, which though abſtractly and in themſelves conſider'd, they are not of an equal Degree of Excellency with others, yet are proper in their Places, and have a ſubſervient Excellency or Aptneſs to promote the Practice of the moſt excellent, and theſe alſo may very juſtly make a Part of a Religion that comes from God. But the Author urges, " Can ſuch Things as have " no Worth or Excellency in them, contri- " bute to the Worth or Excellency of Reli- " gion? If they cou'd, the more they a- " bounded, the more excellent wou'd Reli- " gion be; whereas the Excellency of the " Chriſtian Religion is acknowledg'd to con- " ſiſt in this, that it commands but few of " theſe Things; and he thinks thoſe Men " ridiculous, who whilſt they commend the " Chriſtian Religion as purely ſpiritual, in " Oppoſition to the carnal Religion of the " Jews, yet at the ſame Time contend it " has ſome Ordinances, as little ſpiritual as " any the Jews had, and put a greater Streſs " upon them, than ever the Jews did on any " of their's; and he obſerves, that in Hea- " ven there's no room for arbitrary (by which he means poſitive) " Precepts, to in- " cumber that moral Goodneſs which is the " ſole

" ſole Buſineſs of the Bleſſed above, p. 123, 124. It will eaſily be granted, that every Religion that comes from God, muſt be fitted to promote the Ends for which it is deſign'd; and that there can be nothing in ſuch a Religion, but what Divine Wiſdom ſees proper, and God is certainly the beſt Judge of what is ſo; but I deny that every Religion that comes from God, muſt immediately have the higheſt poſſible Degree of Excellency and Perfection, if by perfect and excellent be meant what is abſolutely ſo, and not as relative to the Ends for which it is given, and to the Condition and Circumſtances of thoſe to whom it is preſcrib'd. The Religion of Men may be different in ſome reſpects from that of Angels, leſs perfect in it ſelf, but more ſuited to them; and the Religion of Men on Earth may differ from that of the Saints in Heaven, leſs perfect abſolutely conſider'd, and yet more agreeable to their preſent Condition and Circumſtances; there may be ſome Things in the Religion of fallen Creatures wiſely adapted to their Circumſtances and Infirmities, which wou'd not have been ſo proper or neceſſary in the Religion of innocent Ones; and the Author himſelf ought not to find fault with this, ſince he lays it down as his great Rule, that the Goodneſs or Fitneſs of Things ought to be judg'd of by the Circumſtances Men are under. Thoſe Things therefore, which abſtractly conſider'd have no innate Worth or Excellency in them, may yet be ſo circumſtanc'd,

ſtanc'd, as to be uſeful to promote the main Ends of Religion. And in this reſpect the Jewiſh Religion, though in it ſelf leſs perfect than the Chriſtian, might be fitted to the Circumſtances of that Time and Nation. It is juſtly mention'd as an Excellency of the Chriſtian Religion above the Jewiſh, that it has leſs of outward Ceremonies; but it does not follow, that therefore thoſe Ceremonies were not proper for the Time in which they were inſtituted, though as the Reaſon and End of them ceas'd at Chriſt's Coming, ſo the Chriſtian Religion was freed from them; yet Divine Wiſdom has not thought fit that it ſhou'd be intirely free from all poſitive Rites. So that here we may obſerve a beautiful Gradation; the more imperfect Jewiſh Diſpenſation gave way to the Chriſtian; as the Chriſtian ſhall to that in Heaven, when we ſhall be put in full Poſſeſſion of the glorious Things themſelves, and therefore ſhall have no need of ſymbolical Rites to be the Signs and Pledges of ſpiritual Benefits as here. Though therefore this Author wou'd be thought to honour Chriſtianity, by pretending that it muſt be *wholly ſpiritual like its Author*, p. 124. If by *wholly ſpiritual* he means without any poſitive Rites or Sacraments, Chriſtianity might indeed appear more ſpiritual without them, but it wou'd be leſs fitted to anſwer the End, leſs ſuited to the State of the Church on Earth, and wou'd want ſome valuable Helps and Incitements to Duty.

There is one Argument behind, which for the Extraordinarineſs of it I cannot but take notice of; and that is, p. 356. where he argues, that "ſince God has given us Faculties to diſtinguiſh between Good and Evil, this ſuppoſes theſe are the only Things he commands and forbids; becauſe otherwiſe thoſe excellent Faculties God has given us wou'd enable us to know but Part of the Will of God." As far as I am capable to underſtand this Argument, it runs thus: That our Faculties were given us only to diſtinguiſh between Things morally good and evil, and therefore our Faculties will not enable us to underſtand any thing but what is ſo. And if he cou'd prove this, he might ſave himſelf any further Trouble; for in vain are Commands given us which we have no Faculties to diſcern, and which it is impoſſible for us to know, though God gave them to us. But what ſtrange Trifling is this? We cou'd not indeed know that God gave poſitive Precepts, or what thoſe Precepts are except God reveal'd them to us, but on Suppoſition of his revealing them to us, our Faculties will as well enable us to know them as any Part of our Duty; they are not obligatory till made known, but they are as capable of being made known or reveal'd as any Commands whatſoever.

Our Author concludes his eleventh Chapter with a Citation from Lord *Shaftsbury*, That "to believe the governing Mind or "Minds not abſolutely and neceſſarily good, "nor

" nor confin'd to what is beſt, but capable of " acting by meer Will and Fancy, is to be " a Demoniſt." 'Tis plain he all along charges thoſe that ſuppoſe God to injoin any poſitive Inſtitutions in Religion, with ſuppoſing God to act arbitrarily, according to meer Will and Fancy; ſo that we have here the goodly Character he compliments them with, they are Demoniſts. How unjuſt this Charge is has been ſufficiently ſhewn. If to ſay, that God never does any thing by meer unreaſonable Will and Pleaſure, or without a wiſe Reaſon known to himſelf, though we may not be able always diſtinctly to aſſign the Reaſons upon which he proceeds; if to ſay that he has a Right to require ſome Things, which abſolutely and abſtractly conſider'd are not morally good or evil, yet as they are circumſtanc'd, may be very uſeful and beneficial, even for the promoting the Practice of thoſe Things that are unqueſtionably good and excellent; if to ſay that accordingly he hath actually requir'd ſome ſuch Things; if this be Demoniſm, then thoſe that plead for poſitive Inſtitutions in Religion may paſs for Demoniſts. But what Character do thoſe deſerve, that are for limiting the Sovereign Lord of the Univerſe, ſo that it is not in his Power to require of his Creatures what an earthly Parent or Maſter may require of his Child or Servant? Who hold that God has not a Right to require any thing of his Creatures, nor are they oblig'd to obey him, any further than they know

the preciſe Reaſon of that Command or Injunction? That he not only cannot require any thing from them that carries the leaſt Hardſhip, but that he cannot command them even in indifferent Matters, or require any thing from them in any Inſtance whatſoever, any further than their own Intereſt is concern'd? That they are capable of judging in all Inſtances what he can or cannot command, that is in other Words, that they are as wiſe and as knowing as he? Theſe are either Principles of the Author's, or Concluſions that ſeem to me to flow naturally from his Principles.

CHAP. V.

That the Law of Nature is not ſo clear to all Mankind, as to render an external Revelation uſeleſs; and that even with reſpect to thoſe Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, which abſolutely ſpeaking are diſcoverable by human Reaſon, a Revelation may be of great Uſe, to give a clearer and more certain Knowledge of 'em than the Bulk of Mankind would have without it.

I Have hitherto conſider'd what the Author offers to prove the abſolute Perfection of the original Law of Nature given to Mankind at the Beginning, that is, that it was ſo perfect that nothing cou'd ever poſſibly be added to it, and that therefore no Revelation cou'd poſſibly ever diſcover any thing but what was a Part of that original Law, nor cou'd God ever by any ſubſequent Law require any thing of Man but what he requir'd at the Beginning of the Creation. In Oppoſition to this it has been ſhewn, that God may require Things afterwards, which he

he did not actually require at the Beginning, and that ſuppoſing an Alteration in the Circumſtances of Mankind, it may be highly agreeable to his Wiſdom and Goodneſs to do ſo, and that therefore this Argument drawn from the ſuppos'd abſolute Perfection of the Law of Nature incapable of any Additions, to prove that there cou'd be no ſubſequent Revelation, is good for nothing.

Let us now conſider what he offers on the Head of the Clearneſs of the Law of Nature. Having, as he ſuppoſes, proved that the Law of Nature is ſo abſolutely perfect, that nothing cou'd ever be added to it, he next endeavours to ſhew, that this Law of Nature is ſo clear and obvious, in all its Extent, to all Mankind, that no external Revelation can make it clearer than it is already. If indeed both theſe Principles be allow'd him, the Concluſion naturally follows, that therefore God never gave any external Revelation at all, ſince upon ſuch a View of Things it muſt be entirely uſeleſs. But if either of theſe Suppoſitions be falſe, the Concluſion fails. For on the one hand, if it may ſeem fit to the Divine Wiſdom to make ſome Additions to that original Law given to Mankind in the Beginning, then though we ſhou'd allow that original Law to be ſufficiently clear and obvious to all Mankind, yet an external Revelation might be uſeful, to let us know what are thoſe Additions which it has pleas'd God for wiſe Ends to make to that original

nal Law; and on the other hand, though it shou'd be suppos'd, that the original Law given to Man in the Beginning was incapable of any Additions, yet if by some means or other there be a Darkness and Corruption on Mankind that hinders them from a clear Knowledge of the Law, an external Revelation may be of great Use to set it in a clearer Light, when obscur'd and defac'd through the Ignorance, Corruption and Prejudices of Mankind. This is what I shall now particularly consider.

It has been already observ'd, that if we take the Law of Nature in that vast comprehensive Sense in which the Author understands it, as adequate to the whole Reason and Nature of Things; as a Law to God himself, and to all reasonable Beings throughout the Universe, comprehending every thing that he can require, and every thing that it is fit for all Orders of intelligent Beings to do in every Instance, it wou'd be a very extravagant Thing to say, that the Law of Nature in this extensive Sense is so very clear and obvious to all Mankind, that every Man even he that can't read his Mother-Tongue, (to use our Author's Expressions) may easily by himself understand it in all its Extent. Nor can I be perswaded that this Gentleman himself cou'd really believe it. And yet his Scheme, as he has dress'd it up, goes upon this Supposition. For if that Law of Nature, which he affirms to be so absolutely perfect that nothing cou'd possibly be added to it,

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and which he makes to take in every thing that is founded in the Nature of Things, if this be not the ſame with that Law of Nature, which he ſuppoſes to be clear and obvious to all Mankind, even thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity, 'tis evident that the Connexion of his Scheme is broken, and the whole Fabrick he has erected upon it falls to the Ground. I might therefore fix my Foot here, and content my ſelf with barely propoſing it to the Reader, whether every Man can take in *the whole Scheme and State and Order of Things*, a Thing which this Writer himſelf tells us, he knows no Man that pretends to do, p. 384.

The Author therefore muſt be oblig'd to change his Scheme; after all the magnificent Things he has ſaid of the Law of Nature, and its abſolute Perfection, to which nothing can poſſibly be added, he muſt now, when he ſets himſelf to ſhew that it is clear to all Mankind, be oblig'd to take it in a more limited Senſe. And here again it is very hard to know, under what preciſe Idea we are to regard that Law of Nature, the Clearneſs of which he aſſerts. He defines the Religion of Nature to be *the Senſe and Practice of thoſe Duties, which reſult from the Knowledge we by our Reaſon have of God and his Perfections, and of our ſelves and our own Imperfections.* But what does he mean by the Knowledge we *by our Reaſon have*, &c. does he mean the Knowledge Men actually have, according to the Uſe they actually make of their

their Reason, or the Knowledge Men might have by their Reason, if improv'd to the utmost of which it is naturally capable. If the former, 'tis evident that in the greatest Part of Mankind this Knowledge is very small and defective; whole Nations are sunk in Barbarism and Ignorance, and have little or no Knowledge at all of God or his Perfections; so that if the Law of Nature is to be measur'd by the Knowledge Men actually have of God and their Duty, it is far from deserving the glorious Epithets he bestows upon it; yet this seems to be what he frequently intends by it. Hence he tells us, that *the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in Fact universal*; and that *an unknown Law* (that is, a Law that is not actually known) *is no Law*: And according to this way of stating the Law of Nature, that is, if nothing is that Law but what Men actually do know, it will be easily own'd to be clear to all Men; and this Author needs take no Pains to shew, that Men are not ignorant of what they actually do know; but then the Law of Nature in this View is far from being absolutely perfect, as far as Men's Knowledge of God and themselves is from being so; instead of being one uniform invariable Thing, as this Writer frequently represents it, who often talks of one universal Religion known and acknowledg'd by all Mankind, it is the most variable Thing in the World, as various as Men's Opportunities, Capacities and Diligence; there are almost as many Laws of Nature as there

are Men; it muſt not be call'd a Law of unchangeable Perfection and without Defects, ſince taken in this Senſe for the Knowledge Men actually have, it is very imperfect and liable to great Defects; and therefore there may be great need of external Revelation to ſupply thoſe Defects. I don't ſee therefore how his Scheme can be poſſibly made to conſiſt on this Foot. But if when he defines the Law of Nature to be the Senſe of thoſe Duties which reſult from *the Knowledge we by our Reaſon have*, &c. he intends not meerly the Knowledge which Men actually have by their Reaſon in its preſent State, but the Knowledge which they might have if they improv'd their Reaſon to the utmoſt of which it is capable; then this does not at all prove that the Law of Nature is ſo clear and obvious to all Mankind, as to render a Revelation uſeleſs, which yet is plainly the Author's Deſign. Many Things there are which Men might know by the utmoſt Improvement of their Reaſon, which yet they never wou'd know, if left meerly to themſelves without particular Inſtruction. And it may be eaſily ſhewn, that even with reſpect to thoſe Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, which abſolutely ſpeaking are diſcoverable by the Light of Reaſon, yet an external Divine Revelation may be highly uſeful to give the Bulk of Mankind a clearer and a more certain Knowledge of them, than they wou'd have if left to themſelves without it. This indeed is what our Author will not allow. But he

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takes care never to state the Question fairly, but perplexes it with many Things that are really not at all to the Purpose, and serve for nothing but to confound the Reader, and mislead him from the true Point in Debate. I shall therefore offer something that may serve to clear the true State of the Case, which this Gentleman has sufficiently puzzled.

And 1. it is to little Purpose to inquire how far the Reason of Man may possibly go, if improv'd to the utmost of its natural Capacity. It is a Question not easily determin'd, what is the utmost Possibility of human Reason, or how far the Faculties of Man in their greatest Improvement can reach. Nor is this a Question of much Use. For no Man, in judging of the Usefulness of any Books or Instructions, measures it by this Rule, that no Books shall be esteem'd to be of any Advantage to Mankind, except they instruct us in Things which we cou'd not otherwise possibly have known by the utmost Improvement of our natural Capacities. Many Things there are which absolutely speaking are not above the Reach of human Reason or Capacity, which yet taking the World as it is not one in ten thousand wou'd ever know, or cou'd be ordinarily expected to do it, without the Advantage of particular Instruction. And yet a considerable Part of what this Gentleman offers on this Head of the Clearness of the Law of Nature, amounts to no more than this, that Men have natural Faculties, which

if carried to the utmoſt Improvement of which they are naturally capable, may enable them to know the main Principles and Duties of that Law. Thus he often talks of the Rules of the Law of Nature being *diſcoverable* or *knowable* by Men, p. 295. that we *muſt as Men be capable of knowing Religion*, p. 197. that "Man has *natural Abilities* to diſtin-"guiſh between Good and Evil, or to know "what is pleaſing or diſpleaſing to God; and "that Men *are able* by their Reaſon to di-"ſtinguiſh between Religion and Superſti-"tion." See the Title of his 13th Chapter. And that "the Law of Nature is what Men "when they come to the Uſe of their Rea-"ſon, are *capable of knowing*, p. 9.

This natural Capacity ſeems to be all that he means by what he ſo much extols, the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature. He tells us, that "God hath at all Times given the "whole Race of Mankind ſufficient means to "enable them to diſcover what he wills them "to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe, p. 5. And this means he makes to be *Reaſon, or the Uſe of thoſe Faculties, whereby Men are diſtinguiſh'd from the Brutes, and that therefore Reaſon, human Reaſon muſt be the means ſufficient to produce its intended Effect*, p. 6. By comparing which Paſſages it appears, that when he ſo often ſuppoſes all Men at all Times to have had ſufficient means for knowing the Law of Nature, he intends no more than this, that God hath given all Men at all Times, in one Age as well as another,

ther, rational Faculties or Capacities, which if improv'd to the utmoſt that is naturally poſſible, might enable them to diſcern the great Principles and Obligations of natural Religion; and in this Senſe he might well ask as he does, "*What Advantage hath one Age* "*in this reſpect above another?* For it will be own'd, that Men have generally had the ſame natural Capacities and Faculties in one Age as in another. But if the Queſtion be concerning the Helps or Advantages for aſſiſting thoſe natural Faculties, it is evident there has been in this reſpect a very great Difference between ſome Perſons and Nations and Ages and others; that ſome have had far greater Advantages for Inſtruction and Improvement in uſeful Knowledge, even of natural Religion, than others; and to ſay, that all Men at all Times have had equal Means in this reſpect, is contrary to Fact. And the Author himſelf ſuppoſes it, when he affirms, that *it is not neceſſary that all Men ſhou'd have equal Knowledge* (even of the Law of Nature, for of this he is ſpeaking) *but that all ſhou'd have ſufficient for the Circumſtances they are in*, p. 5. where he plainly ſuppoſes, that notwithſtanding this natural Sufficiency he ſpeaks of, and the Means which he ſuppoſes to be given to all Men, yet ſome have greater Advantages and Helps for knowing the Principles and Obligations of natural Religion, and therefore greater Means for diſcovering the Will of God than other Men; and therefore know more

more than ſome in other Circumſtances have an Opportunity for knowing. And in this Senſe that which he aſſerts, p. 295. and elſewhere, that *the Will of God, on which the Happineſs of Mankind at all Times depends, is at all Times equally knowable*; if by that be meant, that all Men at all Times have equal Advantages and Opportunities for knowing it, is manifeſtly falſe. It appears then, that the natural Sufficiency of our Reaſon, or of our rational Powers, if improv'd to the utmoſt that they are capable of, for diſcovering the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, does not at all ſhew that therefore a Revelation can be of no Uſe for giving us a clearer Knowledge of that Law, no more than it ſhews, that becauſe our Faculties are naturally ſufficient, therefore we need no Inſtruction of any Kind at all. Notwithſtanding our rational Powers have a natural Capacity for diſcerning Truth, yet 'tis certain we ſtand in need of many Helps and Aſſiſtances to guide us in the Knowledge of Truth, and that in many Caſes we ſhou'd never diſcover it without ſuch Aſſiſtances and Inſtructions. Our Author frequently oppoſes our taking in Things by Reaſon and by Revelation; but theſe are not to be oppos'd to one another, as if they were inconſiſtent. Revelation ſuppoſes us reaſonable Creatures, and to have natural Capacities for diſcerning Truth, or elſe it wou'd be of no Uſe. For if we were Brutes, we cou'd not be capable of knowing or receiving thoſe

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Discoveries; the true Opposition is this, tho' never fairly stated by the Author, not between Reason or our natural Faculties and Revelation, as if Revelation was inconsistent with our rational Faculties, but between Reason under the Conduct of Revelation, and Reason without that Help; or between our knowing by our rational Faculties, when assisted and inlightned by Instruction and Revelation, and our knowing by our rational Faculties, left meerly to themselves without such Assistance.

2dly. The Question is not, whether the main Principles and Duties of Morality, or of the Law of Nature, be so just and reasonable in themselves, that right Reason, if unprejudic'd and duly exercis'd, wou'd approve them, when fairly explain'd, and set in a proper Light? For this will be easily granted; and this is all that the many Passages he produces from Dr. *Clark*, and which he makes so great Use of in his last Chapter, do prove. The Doctor uses many strong Expressions to shew, that the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature are in themselves so clear, so just, so agreeable to Reason, that all unprejudic'd and well-dispos'd Minds can't but approve them, when fairly propos'd and explain'd to them; he speaks of what is in it self clear to right Reason duly exercis'd and improv'd, but does not intend to signify, that therefore all Men do naturally and necessarily know the Law of Nature, and that no Man can possibly be ignorant of it. That this is the Intention

tention of those Passages this Gentleman cites from Dr. *Clark*, appears from several other Passages in his Book, where he clearly explains his Design, if he had been so fair as to produce them. Thus he tells us, that "what these eternal Relations, Respects, "and Proportions of Things, with their "consequent Agreements or Disagreements, "Fitnesses or Unfitnesses, absolutely and ne-"cessarily are in themselves; that also they ap-"pear to be to the Understanding of all intel-"ligent Beings, except those only who under-"stand Things to be what they are not, that "is, whose Understandings are either very im-"perfect, or very much deprav'd." See Discourse of natural and reveal'd Religion, p. 184. 7th Edit. where it is plain, that he supposes those whose Understandings are very imperfect, or very much deprav'd, may not see those Fitnesses or Unfitnesses, *&c.* and this he supposes to be the Case of the far greater Part of Mankind in their present State; and that therefore "few are able, in Reality and "Effect, to discover these Things clearly "and plainly for themselves; but Men have "great need of particular Teaching and much "Instruction to convince them of the Truth, "and Certainty, and Importance of these "Things, to give them a due Sense and clear "and just Apprehensions concerning them, "and to bring them effectually to the Practice "of the plainest and most necessary Duties." This he sets himself largely to prove from p. 272 of his Discourse to p. 281.

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I cannot therefore acquit the Author from groſs Prevarication, when from mangled Paſſages of Dr. *Clark* he wou'd fain make his Readers believe, that he makes the whole Law of Nature, and the Differences of Things, to be what all Men naturally and neceſſarily aſſent to, even without Reflexion, p. 361. and what they all actually do know, and cannot but know in their preſent State, taking Mankind as they now are; and yet it is upon this Miſrepreſentation of the Doctor's Senſe that he ſo unreaſonably triumphs, and unmercifully expoſes him for endeavouring to prove, that a great Part of Mankind are ignorant of what he owns all Men, even without Reflexion or Inſtruction, cannot but naturally and neceſſarily know.

I wonder this Author, when his Hand was in, did not attempt to prove, that Dr. *Clark* alſo ſuppos'd, that all Men's Wills are naturally and neceſſarily determin'd to the Practice of the Duties requir'd in the Law of Nature. For after having ſaid, that "what "the eternal Relations of Things are in "themſelves, that they appear to be to the "Underſtandings of all intelligent Beings, &c. he adds, "and by this Underſtanding "or Knowledge of the natural and neceſſa-"ry Relations, Fitneſſes, and Proportions of "Things, the Wills likewiſe of all intelligent "Beings are conſtantly directed, and muſt "needs be determin'd to act accordingly." 'Tis true he adds, "excepting thoſe only "who will Things to be what they are not,

" and cannot be, that is, whose Wills are " corrupted, *&c.*" But did he not also limit his former Proposition, and except those *whose Understandings are imperfect or deprav'd?* And if the Limitation and Exception must be dropp'd in one Case, in order to expose the Doctor, why not in the other too? And so this learned Writer may be made to maintain, that all Men naturally and necessarily both know and practise the Law of Nature, and consequently that no Man can possibly be either ignorant of it in Notion, or can transgress it in Practice; a Thing both contrary to undeniable Matter of Fact, and to the very Design of the Doctor's whole Book, and which indeed scarce any Man in his Senses wou'd attempt to prove.

I mention this as a Specimen of this Gentleman's Candour, and Treatment of a Person for whom he professes the highest Regard; though I can't help thinking, when I consider how unworthily and disingenuously he treats him, that the Encomiums he bestows upon him, are chiefly design'd to heighten his own Triumphs over the Doctor, and in him over Christianity it self; for he tells us, that if it cou'd be defended, the Doctor of all Men was the most able to defend it.

But to return from this Digression, the true State of the Question in the present Debate is this, Whether all Mankind have, by the meer Light of their own Reason in their present State, such a clear Discovery of the great Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature, that

that no external Revelation can be of use to render it clearer or more certain to any than it is to all Men without it; and consequently whether, taking Mankind as they are, they had best be left every Man to collect his Duty for himself by the meer Light of his own Reason, and to form to himself a System of Morals, and of the great Principles and Obligations of natural Religion, or whether an external Revelation might not be highly useful to the Bulk of Mankind, to give them a clearer Knowledge of these Things, and greater Certainty about them, as well as to inforce the Practice of them by the strongest Motives?

For though the great Principles of natural Religion, and the moral Obligations arising from them, be naturally knowable by us, that is, though it is possible for us to know them; and though the Understanding God hath given us be naturally sufficient, that is, absolutely speaking hath a natural Capacity to know and discern those Principles and Obligations, yet if as the World is circumstanc'd, and taking Mankind as they are, it cannot ordinarily be expected that the Bulk of Mankind shou'd know them properly without Assistance, then such Assistance may be of vast Use to help them to a right Discernment of them. And therefore if in Condescension to the Weakness, and Corruption of Mankind, and to rescue them from the Ignorance and Darkness in which they were involv'd, it has pleas'd God to give a plain external Revelation for instructing and directing us to a right Discernment

even of the great Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, and to bind them upon us by the ſtrongeſt Motives, this is certainly a great Goodneſs, and ought to be acknowledg'd as ſuch.

Our Author therefore can never anſwer his End, which is to ſhew, that an external Revelation can be of no Uſe to inſtruct us in the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, except he can prove that theſe Things are ſo obvious and plain to all Men, that even the Bulk of Mankind need no Aſſiſtance to enable them to form a right Judgment concerning them.

Accordingly this is what he frequently attempts to ſhew. He often talks as if he thought there were a regular Scheme of Principles, which he calls the Law of Nature, fairly drawn upon the Mind of every Man, in ſuch a manner that it is ſcarce poſſible for any Man to miſtake it; that all the Principles of Religion, all the Duties incumbent upon us, are ſo clear, that all Men ſee them at firſt view, and it is impoſſible for theſe Principles to be made clearer to any Man by any outward Teaching, than they are to all Men without it; and if this be once granted, that the whole Compaſs of our Duty is known to all Men without an external Revelation, as perfectly as clearly and certainly as it cou'd be by the Help of ſuch a Revelation, the Conſequence is very plain, that an external Revelation is intirely uſeleſs. This ſeems to be really the Author's

Author's Scheme. But that I may not wrong him, I shall produce his own Words.

As he tells us, that "there is a Religion "of Nature and Reason written in the Hearts "of every one of us from the first Creation, "and which God *continually impresses* on "the Minds of all Men, and *continually* "*dictates* to them, p. 8, 59, 135." So he declares, that "no great Wisdom is requir'd "to know the Law of Nature; and that no "well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of "it, p. 398." That "it is a perpetual stand-"ing Rule for Men of the meanest as well as "highest Capacity, and carries its own Evi-"dence with it, p. 243." He supposes "the "eternal Reason and unalterable Relations of "Things to be obvious to the meanest Capa-"city, and to be apparent to the whole World, p. 292, 326. "even to those that are unable "to read in their Mother-Tongue, p. 295. Accordingly he asks, "let any one say, how is "it possible God cou'd more fully make known "his Will to all intelligent Creatures, than "by making every thing within and without "them a Declaration of it, and an Argument "for observing it? p. 19." where he seems to say, that God cou'd not possibly make the Law of Nature clearer than it is, or give a plainer Discovery of it to Mankind than he has done already. To the same Purpose he saith, p. 27. that "had God from Time to "Time spoke to all Mankind in their several "Languages, and his Words had miraculously "convey'd the same Ideas to all Persons; yet

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" he cou'd not ſpeak more plainly than he " has done by the Things themſelves, and " the Relation which Reaſon ſhews there is " between them, p. 27." where he plainly intimates, that the Reaſon of all Mankind ſo clearly and ſtrongly ſhews them their Duty, by collecting it from the Nature and Relations of Things, that no outward Inſtruction can give them any Aſſiſtance in it, or help them to form a clearer Judgment than they may eaſily of themſelves do without it. And yet I think it may be affirm'd, that one Man can, by ſpeaking or writing, help another to form a better Judgment concerning Things and their Relations, than he wou'd have without ſuch Inſtruction; and ſhall we ſay then that God himſelf can't do it?

But to proceed: He often talks as if the Principles and Obligations of natural Religion were ſo clear, that Men cou'd not poſſibly miſtake them. Having ſaid, that " what we " call Inſtinct is a certain and infallible Guide " for inferior Animals;" he asks, " has God " a greater Kindneſs for the Brute than the " rational Creation? And if we can't charge " God with acting thus partially, muſt we " not be oblig'd to own, that Reaſon is as " certain a Guide for rational Creatures, as " Inſtinct is for irrational? p. 277." And he tells us, that " thoſe Relations (viz. which " we ſtand in to God and to one another) " which are the permanent Voice of God by " which he ſpeaks to all Mankind, do at all " Times *infallibly* point to us our Duty in

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" all the various Circumſtances of Life, p. 31. Where one wou'd think he means, that all Men are ſo infallibly guided by thoſe Relations, that they can't poſſibly miſtake their Duty. To the ſame Purpoſe he ſaith, p. 30. that " if we obſerve what our Reaſon will " inform us of the Nature of our great Creator and Governor, we can't fail of knowing our Duty." And again, that " if God " only commands what the Nature of Things " ſhews to be fit, *'tis ſcarce poſſible* that Men " (though endleſly divided upon the Account " of their different Traditions) ſhou'd miſtake " their Duty; ſince a Mind that's attentive " can as eaſily diſtinguiſh fit from unfit, as " the Eye can Beauty from Deformity, or " the Ear Harmony from Diſcord, p. 30, 31. That " the Light God hath given to diſtinguiſh between religious Truth and Falſhood, " cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them " in Things of ſo great Moment, p. 178." He talks as if the Deiſts were infallibly guided to diſtinguiſh between Religion and Superſtition, p. 371. where he tells us (ſpeaking of the Deiſts) that " having critically exa- " min'd Doctrines by that Reaſon which God " has given them, to diſtinguiſh Religion from " Superſtition, they are ſure not to run into " any Errors of Moment." He asks, " if " the Creator expects nothing from his Creatures, but what the Relation they ſtand in " to him and one another makes it fit for them " to do, how can they be ignorant of their " Duty? p. 357." Where he ſpeaks, as if it were

were not possible for Men to be ignorant of what is fit for them to do, and of what the Relation they stand in to God and to one another does require or admit. And he represents the Deists as "celebrating the unlimited "Goodness of God, in supposing that God "has given all Men at all Times, even those "of the meanest Capacity, sufficient means "of discovering what makes for their present "and future Happiness; and that no Man "can plead Ignorance of a Law as evident "as that the Sun is bright, or Snow white, "and as inseparable from rational Nature as "the Pulse of the Heart and Arteries are "from animal Nature, p. 362, 363." This he infers from a Passage of Dr. *Clark*'s, which is design'd to shew, that Reason, when rightly exercis'd and purg'd from vicious Prejudices, cannot but assent to and approve the great Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature, when fairly propos'd to it; but this Author applies it to all Mankind in their present State, as if the actual Knowledge of the whole Law of Nature were so inseparable from rational Nature, that it is as impossible for any reasonable Creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for any Animals to live without the Pulse of the Heart and Arteries; that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is naturally necessary, and comes with irresistible Evidence; that it needs no Reflexion or Consideration, but the most illiterate Rustick may as easily and certainly know it, as a Man that has made the deepest Inquiries. It cannot therefore be

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wonder'd at, that this Writer seems sometimes to assert, that all Men do actually know the whole Law of Nature, though at other Times he seems only to plead for their being capable of knowing it. Hence he finds fault with Dr. *Clark* for saying, that *the Knowledge of the Law is in fact by no means universal*, and endeavours to prove that it is in fact universal, p. 379.

And now if this be a just Representation of the State of Mankind; if it be true, that God cou'd not possibly make known his Will more clearly, or speak more plainly than he has already done to all Mankind by the Light of Nature; if all the Principles and Duties of natural Religion be so clearly known to all Men that they see it at first View, and it is scarce possible for them to mistake it; if it be impossible to make it clearer to any Man by any outward Teaching, than it is to all Men without it; if the Knowledge of the Law of Nature be in fact universal; and all Mankind actually know their Duty to God and Man, and can't possibly be ignorant of it; if all this be so as this Gentleman represents it, it must be own'd that there is no need of any outward Revelation at all, to tell Men what they all know, and cannot but know already.

But methinks he knows little of the World, or of the present State of the human Nature, that can persuade himself that this is a just Representation of the Case. If any Man under Pretence of doing Honour to God, and

ſtanding up for the Dignity and Perfection of the human Nature, ſhou'd take upon him to affirm, that all Men are actually good and virtuous, kind and benevolent, pious and juſt, ſober and temperate; that there is no ſuch thing as Vice, Cruelty, Fraud or Violence, Impiety or Intemperance in the World; for theſe Things are contrary to the very Conſtitution of the human Nature, and to the very Make of Man, and inconſiſtent with the Order of his Faculties; that therefore all Complaints of theſe Things are vain and groundleſs, a Libel on the Dignity of human Nature, and a blaſpheming God the Author of it; if any Man ſhou'd talk at this rate, and boaſt of his Scheme as highly conſulting the Honour of God, and making an amiable Repreſentation of human Nature, wou'd this be able to perſuade Men contrary to plain Fact, and to what they all evidently ſee and know by daily Obſervation and Experience, that indeed the World is univerſally good and virtuous, and that there neither is nor can be Vice or Wickedneſs among Men? One wou'd indeed be apt to wiſh that ſuch a Repreſentation of human Nature were true, but it wou'd be hard to make any Man believe it is ſo. The ſame I muſt ſay to the Scheme of the Author of *Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation*; it looks beautifully in Speculation, and I heartily wiſh it were true; but evident Fact and Experience proves that it is falſe.

He wou'd perſuade us, that all Mankind are clear-ſighted, when we find they are general-

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ly involv'd in Darkneſs and Error; that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature, in its important Principles and Obligations, is in fact univerſal and inſeparable from the rational Nature, when we plainly ſee that in fact it is not ſo; that Men can ſcarce poſſibly miſtake their Duty, when we find they actually do miſtake it in very important Inſtances; that it is ſo clear and plain, that even the moſt illiterate, and thoſe of the meaneſt Abilities, without Inſtruction may eaſily diſcern it, when it is evident from Experience, that without Inſtruction they wou'd not diſcern it; that they cannot poſſibly be ignorant of it, when we find in fact that great Numbers are ſo, and have been ſo in all Ages; that all Men actually agree in their Judgments about it, as much as they do that the Sun is bright and the Snow white, when we find in fact that they mightily diſagree about it. Yea the Author himſelf ſubverts his own goodly Scheme, when he frequently ſuppoſes almoſt all Mankind, Jews, Heathens, Chriſtians, to have fallen from the original Religion of Nature; a great Part of his Book is ſpent in Invectives againſt that Superſtition which he ſuppoſes to have prevail'd all over the World in all Ages and Nations, and from which none are exempted but the *free-thinking Few*, as he calls them, (ſee p. 169) by whom he certainly underſtands thoſe that like himſelf are for caſting off all external Revelation, and adhering to what he calls the *pure ſimple Dictates* of the Law of Nature. And I hope to be

able to prove before I have done, that even this Gentleman, with all his boaſted Clearneſs, is very wrong in his Notions of ſome of the main Principles of the Law of Nature, the Clearneſs of which he ſo much extols.

Now it is unconceivable, that almoſt all Mankind in all Ages ſhou'd be thus deceiv'd and impos'd upon in Matters of great Importance, and ſhou'd be generally involv'd in groſs Superſtition and Ignorance of *the true primitive natural Religion*, as he calls it, if the Caſe was as he repreſents it, if it was ſo plain to all Mankind that they cou'd not but know it, and cou'd ſcarce poſſibly be miſtaken about it.

It cannot be denied, that it was generally true of the Heathen World, that (as the Apoſtle expreſſes it) "they chang'd the Glo-"ry of the incorruptible God into an Image "made like to corruptible Man, and to Birds "and four-footed Beaſts and creeping Things, "and worſhipped and ſerved the Creature "more than the Creator, *Rom.* i. 23, 25. The Knowledge and Worſhip of the only true God was in a great meaſure loſt among Men, amidſt a Multiplicity of falſe and fictitious Deities, to whom they paid that Adoration that was only due to the Supreme. Polytheiſm, or the Acknowledgment and Worſhip of many Gods, generally prevail'd; and it is aſtoniſhing to think what ſtrange Things they ſet up for Deities, to which they erected Altars and paid Divine Honours, and that even

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in *Greece* and *Rome*, the Seat of Learning and Politeneſs, where they had the Advantage of the Writings and Inſtructions of thoſe Philoſophers for whom this Author profeſſes ſo high a Veneration. Every one knows that the common Pagan Theology was full of the Rapes, Adulteries, and Contentions of their Gods, whom they repreſented with all the Vices and Paſſions of frail Mortals; ſo that ſcarce any Man cou'd be guilty of Immoralities ſo groſs, but he might plead ſome one or other of their Deities for an Example. Suitable to their Deities were the Rites of their Worſhip; many of 'em abſurd and ridiculous, ſome of 'em cruel and barbarous, and ſome of 'em impure and laſcivious, and evidently ſubverſive of Morality.

It is evident then, that the Heathen World were generally ſunk into the moſt groſs and deplorable Darkneſs and Ignorance of the Law of Nature, in ſome of its important Branches. And if this Repreſentation be a juſt one, as it undeniably is, it muſt ſeem a very odd Queſtion that he asks, p. 394. *How can we be ignorant what Worſhip, what Service we are to render to God?* As if it was impoſſible for Men to be ignorant of what we find in fact, almoſt the whole World was ignorant of, and are ſo to this Day, except where they are under the Conduct of Revelation; and probably this Gentleman thinks they are ignorant of it too.

And now what ſhall we ſay to his Aſſertion, that " it requir'd no great Wiſdom to

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" know the Law of Nature, and that no well-
" meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of it?
p. 398. Was there ſcarce any ſuch Thing as
a well-meaning Gentile for many Ages in
Greece and *Rome?* Did they all, againſt
their own expreſs Knowledge, univerſally
counteract the Law of Nature? Is not this
to pronounce a very heavy Sentence indeed
upon the whole Heathen World?

But, ſays our Author, " it can't be impu-
" ted to any Defect in the Light of Nature,
" that the Pagan World ran into Idolatry;
" but to their being intirely govern'd by
" Prieſts, who pretended Communication
" with their Gods; and to have thence their
" Revelations, which they impos'd on the
" Credulous as Divine Oracles; whereas the
" Buſineſs of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation was
" to deſtroy all thoſe traditional Revelations;
" and reſtore, free from Idolatry, the true
" primitive, and natural Religion, implanted
" in Mankind from the Creation, p. 379.

I wou'd here remark, that he ſuppoſes the
true primitive natural Religion to be free from
Idolatry; and if ſo, how can he pretend that
this true primitive Religion is what all Men
are agreed in, tho' endleſly divided about o-
ther Things. that it is known to all Mankind,
and has been always the ſame? See p. 11, 12.
If the true primitive natural Religion was free
from Idolatry, muſt it not be own'd that the
Heathens were fallen from that true primitive
natural Religion? He endeavours indeed to
account for it by caſting the Fault upon the
Prieſts;

Priests; but if the Light of Nature was so clear and strong as he represents it, and that *no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of the Law of Nature*, that is, the true primitive natural Religion, I can't conceive how it cou'd be in the Power of the Priests to bring the whole World into Idolatry and into Superstition, which he frequently supposes, and endeavours in his whole eighth Chapter to prove, to be plainly contrary to the Religion of Nature. Besides, he does wrong to lay all the Blame upon the Priests; since it is manifest, that the publick Laws establish'd by their best and wisest Men, their Law-givers and Heroes, that set up for reforming and civilizing Mankind, concurr'd to establish Idol-Worship, and give a Sanction to the popular Superstition. And it may be added, that the Men who made it their Business to addict themselves to the Study of Wisdom, and assum'd the glorious Title of Philosophers, patroniz'd the common Idolatry and Superstition by their Maxims and by their own Practice.

I know the Author takes a great deal of pains to clear the Philosophers; they were clear-sighted Men, and had a perfect Knowledge of the Law of Nature. He will not allow what Dr. *Clark* alledges, that they were ignorant of the acceptable way of worshipping God; and yet he cannot deny what the Doctor produces for the Proof of it, that they fell universally into the Practice of the most foolish Idolatry. See p. 395, *&c.* He seems willing to vindicate the Knowledge of those

thoſe Philoſophers at the Expence of their Honeſty and Candor; that, contrary to their own Conſciences, they countenanc'd what they knew to be the groſſeſt Idolatry and Superſtition, highly diſhonourable to the ſupreme Being. This he particularly ſuppoſes to have been the Caſe of *Plato* and *Cicero*; and the Excuſe he makes for the latter is pretty extraordinary, that "*as a Philoſopher he* "*not only knew but ſpoke the Truth, though* "*as a Prieſt he thought fit to diſſemble*, p. 396. A very nice Diſtinction this; by the Help of which the ſame Man may be prov'd to be both very honeſt and a great Knave. But if *Cicero* the Prieſt be condemn'd by the ſupreme Judge of the World, for diſſembling and countenancing that Superſtition and Idolatry which his own Conſcience diſapprov'd, what wou'd become of *Cicero* the Philoſopher? He produces a Paſſage out of his *Oratio pro Domo ſua ad Pontifices*, to ſhew with what Freedom he treats the Prieſts; but it might be eaſily ſhewn, that this Paſſage, like many others of his Quotations, is nothing to the Purpoſe. He did not deſign, in the Words this Gentleman produces, to reflect on the Prieſts, or on the Religion of his Country, of both which he ſpeaks all along in that Oration with great Reſpect, but on *Clodius* for polluting the ſacred Rites, and making uſe of the Pretence of Religion and Prieſthood, for ſerving the Ends of his own Ambition and Avarice. Does not he begin that Oration with praiſing the Wiſdom of their Anceſtors, in appointing that

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the ſame Perſons that had the chief Adminiſtration in Civil Affairs, ſhou'd alſo preſide over the Ceremonies of Religion? [which by the way ſhews, that when this Author reflects upon the Heathen Prieſts, it is in effect to lay the Blame on the greateſt Men in the Commonwealth.] Does he not every where there ſpeak of their Office, and of the publick Ceremonies of Religion, with great Regard, and conclude that Oration with a moſt ſolemn Addreſs to *Jupiter Capitolinus*, to *Veſta*, and the other Deities, by whoſe Care he ſuppoſes the *Roman* Commonwealth to have been firſt founded, and ſtill protected? He declares, that it was one of the greateſt Advantages he propos'd to himſelf in his Return from his Baniſhment, to be reſtor'd to their Temples and ſacred Rites again, and appeals to them, that to defend and ſupport theſe had been the chief Care and the moſt glorious Work of his Conſulſhip.

But he ſays, *Cicero* thought it prudent to uſe ſome *ſoftening Expreſſions*. What does he call *ſoftening Expreſſions*? Is recommending the Worſhip both of the Celeſtial Deities, (that is, *Jupiter*, *Juno*, *Apollo*, &c.) and of the Demi-gods and Heroes, (ſuch as *Hercules*, *Romulus*, *Æſculapius*, *Bacchus*) and of the Houſhold Gods, and urging it as a Duty in theſe Things to follow the Religion of their Anceſtors, is this only to uſe ſoftening Expreſſions? Yet this he does in his Treatiſe of Laws, *Lib.* 2. one of his beſt and moſt ſerious Writings, where he appears with the

greateſt Gravity, and puts on the Character of a Law-giver.

Indeed though *Cicero*, *Plato*, and many others of the Philoſophers, did not approve of ſome of the popular Superſtitions, and the Rites made uſe of in the Worſhip of their Deities, and laugh'd at many of the common Stories and Traditions, yet it does not appear from their moſt ſerious Writings, that they diſapprov'd that kind of Worſhip in general which was then in Uſe, that is, Image-Worſhip, and the Worſhip of the inferior Deities, or, as this Author calls them, the mediatory Gods, which yet he thinks and endeavours to prove is contrary to the Law of Nature, or to what Reaſon dictates. See the Beginning of his eighth Chapter. It is well known that the *Platonick* Philoſophers made the Doctrine of Demon-Worſhip a Part of their Philoſophy; ſo that their Philoſophy it ſelf was calculated to promote and defend the publick Superſtition; and after Chriſtianity appear'd, and condemn'd the common Idolaty, the Philoſophers were zealous Advocates for the Rites of the Heathen Worſhip, and the Honour of their Deities; and the moſt refin'd of them employ'd all their Eloquence, all the Arts and plauſible Colours of reaſoning their Philoſophy cou'd furniſh them with, to defend the eſtabliſh'd Idolatry, and uphold the tottering Superſtition of their Anceſtors. And I have not ſo very bad an Opinion of their Sincerity, as to think that in all this they ſpoke againſt their Conſciences, and ſo zealouſly defended what they themſelves thought

thought highly dishonourable to the supreme Being.

I can't therefore but think it a very pertinent Question of Dr. *Clark*, though our Author seems to think it a very foolish one, p. 398. "What Grounds our modern Deists have to "imagine, that if they themselves had lived "without the Light of the Gospel, they had "been wiser than *Plato*, *Socrates*, and *Ci-*"*cero?*" If those great Men, with all their Light, and notwithstanding all their Wisdom and Penetration, were so much in the dark in Things of considerable Importance, and on which the right Worship of the Deity so much depends, what Reason is there to think that our modern Gentlemen wou'd have been more able to find out the true and acceptable manner of worshipping God, in Opposition to all Superstition, false Worship, and Idolatry than they? I suppose these Gentlemen now look upon the worshipping of Images, and of inferior Deities or Demons, as gross Superstition; it is plain this Author does, and that he represents it as owing *to very unworthy Notions of the supreme Being*; see p. 86. And how came they to discover this any more than *Plato* and *Cicero*, and the most learned Philosophers of *Greece* and *Rome*? It can be ascrib'd to nothing so properly as to their being bred up under the Light of the Gospel, and then they ascribe that to the meer Force of their own Reason, for which they were originally indebted to Revelation. Nay what Security wou'd there be if the Gospel was once banish-

ed from amongſt us, that they wou'd not generally relapſe in a few Generations into the ſame Superſtition and Idolatry, in which their Pagan Anceſtors were involv'd, and which ſtill prevails in all Countries where Men have no other Light than that of Nature to direct them? For as to *Mahometan* Countries, it may juſtly be preſum'd, that *Mahomet* borrow'd his Notions of God and his Worſhip from the holy Scriptures, which it is plain he was acquainted with.

Upon this view we may eaſily ſee with what Juſtice this Writer finds fault with Dr. *Clark* for ſaying, that *the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in fact by no means univerſal*, p. 379, 380. a Thing capable of as evident Proof as any Fact whatſoever. And therefore all the Author's Arguings againſt it are no better than Arguments againſt plain undeniable Fact; and againſt what he himſelf muſt own to be ſo, ſince he makes the Law of Nature to be free from Idolatry. We need not therefore give our ſelves much Trouble to examine the Reaſons he produces on this Head, p. 379, 380. and which after all prove no more than that Men are *capable* of knowing the Law of Nature, if they improv'd their reaſoning Faculties to the utmoſt; which is not to the preſent Queſtion. This is all that the Argument proves, which he draws from Man's being an accountable Creature; this only ſhews, that therefore he muſt be *capable* of knowing that Law for which he is accountable; not that (as this Author expreſſes it) *the Light*

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of Nature, or every Man's own Reason, *plainly and undeniably teaches him that Law*, (in all its Branches) if by this he means, that it so teaches him, that no Man can in fact be ignorant of it. When the Apostle *Paul* declares in the Passages produc'd by the Author, speaking of the Gentiles, that *that which was known of God was manifest in them*, and that *when they knew God they glorified him not as God*, this is only design'd to shew, that the Gentiles had some Knowledge of God by the Light of Nature, and might have had more, if they had made a just Improvement of their Reason; but it cou'd not be his Design in these Words to insinuate, that they all actually knew the whole Law of Nature, and particularly relating to the true Worship of the Deity, when he himself there shews, that *they became vain in their Imaginations*, or Reasonings, [διαλογισμοις] *and their foolish Heart was darkned.*

The Author's Inference from the Apostle's saying, that *the Gentiles having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves*, and that *they that have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law*, is so very remarkable, that I cannot pass it by, *viz.* that "this shews that the Law of Nature and "Grace are the same; and that there is but "one Law, whether that Law be written "on Paper, or in Men's Hearts only; and "that all Men, by the Judgment they pass "on their own Actions, are conscious of "this Law." That is, as the Author plain-

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ly intends it, that they actually know that Law in all its Extent. Where he makes the Apoſtle to mean, that the Law of Nature written in the Hearts of the Gentiles, and the Goſpel or Law of Grace are the ſame in all Reſpects, and of the ſame Extent, and that all Men actually know it; that is, that the Gentiles already knew by Nature that Goſpel which he was commiſſion'd to preach to 'em; and ſo he was to inſtruct 'em in nothing but what they actually knew before. To put ſuch a Meaning upon the Apoſtle's Words, is not treating him with common Candor and Decency; how cou'd he then declare to the *Athenians* (the moſt knowing and learned among the Heathens) that he came to declare to 'em *the unknown God whom they ignorantly worſhipped*? Acts 17. 23. How cou'd he call the Times paſt of the Gentiles *the Times of Ignorance*, v. 30. How cou'd he repreſent them as *alienated from the Life of God through the Ignorance that was in them becauſe of the Hardneſs of their Hearts*, *Eph.* 4. 18. and give this Account of his Commiſſion, that he was ſent *to turn them from Darkneſs unto Light*, &c. Acts 26. 18.

Nor is the other Argument he offers, p. 380. more to the Purpoſe, *viz.* that *an unknown Law is no Law, and that therefore the Gentiles muſt have known that Law.* It is not neceſſary to the Obligation of a Law that it be actually known; it is ſufficient if it have been promulgated ſo that Men might have known it; this Argument therefore proves indeed,

deed, that the Gentiles might have known that Law far better that they did, if it had not been owing to their own culpable Negligence and sinful Prejudices; and in this Case their Ignorance of the Law of Nature did not absolutely excuse or free them from the Obligation of it; but this does not prove that all Men actually know that Law, and that the Knowledge of it is in fact universal. This is what the Author shou'd here prove, if he argued to the Purpose, since he is arguing against the Doctor's Assertion, *that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in fact by no means universal*; but when we expect to see this prov'd, he slips the Question, and proves another thing, *viz.* that Men are capable of knowing it, or that it is possible for them to know it.

Indeed the main Strength of his fourteenth Chapter is bended to prove, that Men, particularly the Heathens, were not *unavoidably ignorant* of the great Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature; Dr. *Clark* seems to assert this; and the Author takes his Expressions in the utmost Strictness, as signifying that it was simply and absolutely impossible for them to know it; but a little Candor wou'd have taught him, that the Doctor did not speak of a simple and natural Impossibility. For he expressly saith, that *in Speculation this may seem possible, but in Experience it has appear'd otherwise*; see Discourse of natural and reveal'd Religion, p. 302. And again, that *the bare natural Possibility of the Thing cannot be denied*, ibid.

But

But though the Ignorance of the Gentiles, with reſpect to the Law of Nature, was not abſolutely and naturally unavoidable; though abſolutely ſpeaking it might be ſaid not to be ſimply impoſſible for them to ſhake off thoſe Prejudices; for if they had us'd their utmoſt poſſible Diligence, and improv'd their Reaſon to the utmoſt that they were naturally capable of, they might have diſcover'd the Abſurdity of that Idolatry and Superſtition, and might have had far worthier and juſter Notions of God and of his Worſhip than they generally had; yet in fact taking human Nature as it now is, and ſpeaking according to the ordinary Courſe of Things, and the common Temper of Mankind in this preſent State, it was ſo difficult for thoſe that were born in ſuch Times of Degeneracy, to avoid the common Corruption and Idolatry, that it is ten thouſand to one that they wou'd never, if left meerly to themſelves and to the Force of their own Reaſon, without any farther Aſſiſtance, overcome thoſe Prejudices, and recover out of that Superſtition in which they lay involv'd. What Allowances may be made for this by the wiſe and merciful Governor of the World, is another Queſtion; tho' the Author all along artfully confounds theſe two Queſtions, which are very diſtinct; whether the Gentiles were generally ignorant of the Law of Nature, in ſome of its important Articles and Obligations? and how God will deal with them notwithſtanding this? The former is a Matter of Fact we can eaſily judge of;

of; the latter we cannot properly take upon us to determine, though I think it is eaſy to ſhew (and hope to do it afterwards) that we can have more favourable Thoughts of the State of the Heathens than this Gentleman can have conſiſtently with his own Scheme.

But we muſt not argue againſt plain Matter of Fact, ſuch as this, that the Heathens were univerſally in a State of groſs Ignorance and Superſtition for many Ages, under Pretence that it can't be reconcil'd to the Divine Goodneſs; as reaſonably might we deny that the World is full of Sin and Wickedneſs, and that Mankind are in a very corrupt and degenerate State, though we plainly ſee it is ſo, becauſe this is at leaſt as hard to account for as the other.

By this we may judge of the Author's labour'd Harangue in his laſt Chapter, which he repeats and with ſo much Art exaggerates, to ſhew the Abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that "God "plac'd Mankind, without any Fault of theirs, "in an unavoidable State of Degeneracy and "Corruption for 4000 Years together, and "ſtill continues the greateſt Part of them in "the ſame State; and that he gave them no "other Light but what had ſuch undeniable "Defects, as made them incapable of know-"ing their Duty.

That *the Light of Nature* (if by that be meant the Knowledge Men actually had of the Law of Nature by their own Reaſon, when left to themſelves without a Divine Revelation) *had undeniable Defects*, as Dr. *Clark* expreſſes it,

is manifeſt in Fact; but it does not follow, that therefore *God gave them no other Light but what had ſuch undeniable Defects, as made them incapable of knowing their Duty*, as this Author ſpeaks, p. 399. as if God himſelf was the Cauſe of thoſe Defects, and of that Corruption of their Reaſon; for the Reaſon he gave them, if duly improv'd, might have carried them much further than it did, and might have enabled them to ſee the Abſurdity of thoſe Superſtitions in which they were involv'd; nor can it be ſaid, that "*God plac'd* "*them in a State of unavoidable Degene-* "*racy and Corruption, and ſtill continues* "*the greateſt Part of Mankind in that* "*State*, except we make his *ſuffering* them to fall into that State, and to continue in it, to be the ſame with his *cauſing* them to fall and to continue in that State. That the Heathens were in a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption, and that they continued in it for many Ages, this Author himſelf can't deny, ſince he muſt own that that Idolatry and Superſtition in which they were involv'd, was a Degeneracy from the true primitive Religion of Nature, and a Corruption of it; and if he can't deny they were in ſuch a State, he can't deny that God ſuffer'd them to fall into that State, and to continue in it. But muſt thoſe that ſay no more than this, be repreſented as ſaying that God himſelf *plac'd* them in that State, that he *caus'd* them to fall into it, and that he *continued* them in it, as if he was the Cauſe of their Ignorance, their Idola-

Idolatry and Superſtition? I don't ſee how this can be juſtified, except upon this Principle which this Gentleman ſeems ſometimes to advance, but which bears as hard upon natural Religion as reveal'd, that God is to be reputed the Cauſe of whatſoever he permits; and ſo he may be made the Author of all the Miſchief and Wickedneſs in the World, ſince it cannot be denied that he permits it.

But though God was not the Cauſe of that Degeneracy, that Darkneſs and Corruption in which the greateſt Part of Mankind lay involv'd for ſo many Ages, and which was really and originally owing to their own Fault; yet if in Compaſſion to this degenerate State of the World, he ſhou'd grant a clear external Revelation to recover them out of that State of Superſtition and Corruption, it wou'd be great Goodneſs, though it was not what he was abſolutely oblig'd to; and it can ſcarce be reaſonably ſaid, that ſuppoſing ſuch a State of Things, a Revelation to clear and reſtore the Law of Nature wou'd be of no Uſe or Advantage. So that if Chriſtianity was no more than what this Author ſometimes pretends to prove it is, *a Republication of the Law of Nature*, when through the Corruption of Mankind it was generally defac'd and obſcur'd, it had been a ſignal Benefit to the World. As to what this Gentleman lays ſo much Streſs upon, that if ſuch a Revelation had been given for ſuch Purpoſes at all, it muſt have been given equally to all Mankind; all that I ſhall at preſent ſay concerning it is, that I can't

ſee why he, who ſuppoſes that God left all Mankind in all Ages to extricate themſelves as well as they cou'd out of their Degeneracy and Corruption by the meer Force of their own Reaſon without any further Aſſiſtance, ſhou'd be thought to give a more advantageous Idea of the Divine Goodneſs, than thoſe who ſuppoſe that God has not only given Men the Light of Reaſon to inſtruct them, (for this we own as well as he) but that when through the Corruption of Mankind this prov'd ineffectual, he has interpos'd in an extraordinary way, by giving them an additional external Revelation.

But, ſays he, why is not this Revelation given to all Mankind? But is it not better to give it to ſome Part of Mankind, than to none at all, which is the Author's Suppoſition? If we ſuppoſe that God left a great Part of Mankind for many Ages in that State of Darkneſs, into which they had brought themſelves, without interpoſing in an extraordinary way to recover them out of it, this is what the Author ſuppoſes as well as we, and therefore he muſt maintain that this is not inconſiſtent with the Divine Goodneſs; but beſides this, we ſuppoſe that he has actually given extraordinary Diſcoveries of his Will to a conſiderable Part of Mankind, for recovering them out of that Degeneracy and Corruption into which they had fallen, whereas he thinks that he never gave ſuch Diſcoveries to any. And I think it may be ſafely left to the Judgment of any common Underſtanding,

ſtanding, which of theſe Schemes has the Advantage. And wou'd it not be very odd, on ſuch a Suppoſition, for thoſe to whom ſuch an extraordinary Revelation was given, to reject it meerly becauſe it was not given to all Mankind as well as to them? This wou'd indeed be an extraordinary Goodneſs to them, which they ſhou'd thankfully acknowledge and carefully improve, but it wou'd be no Injuſtice to the reſt, who on this Suppoſition wou'd be put into no worſe a Condition than they were before; a Condition in which, according to this Gentleman himſelf, it was not inconſiſtent with the Divine Goodneſs to leave them.

'Tis an Inſtance of this Writer's Art, that he repreſents all Complaints of the Darkneſs and Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, if left to themſelves and their own unaſſiſted Reaſon, as *ablaſpheming the Law of Nature it ſelf.* Thus he charges Dr. *Clark* as deſigning *to ſhew, that the Fault was not in Mankind, but in the Guide God gave them, even in the eternal, univerſal, and unchangeable Law of Nature*, p. 376, 377. And again he charges him with *writing after ſuch a Manner, as if he thought the beſt way to ſupport the Dignity of Revelation, was to derogate from the immutable and eternal Law of Nature, in which tho' he aſſerts there are undeniable Defects, yet he owns that God governs all his own Actions by it, and expects that all Men ſhou'd govern theirs*, p. 382. But this is groſs Miſrepreſentation. It is evident to any

any one that reads the Doctor's Diſcourſe with common Attention and Candour, that his Deſign is to ſhew, that the Fault was not in the original Law of Nature, which he ſuppoſes to be always in it ſelf juſt and right, but that Men had through their own Corruption loſt a right Knowledge of it; the Law in it ſelf is not capable of being deprav'd, but it is manifeſt the Reaſon of Mankind is capable of being obſcur'd and deprav'd. And are not theſe very diſtinct Things, to find fault with the Law of Nature, and to find fault with the Corruption of Mankind, and to ſay they have not thro' their own vicious Prejudices a right Knowledge of that Law? And muſt he that only ſays the latter, be traduc'd and repreſented as *blaſpheming natural Religion*, and *reviling a Religion that is eternal, univerſal, and unchangeable*? See p. 377.

But this Writer artfully confounds *the Law* and *Light of Nature*, and argues from the Clearneſs of the one to that of the other. Indeed it is often very hard to know what this Gentleman means by *the Light of Nature*, he takes it in ſuch various Senſes. Sometimes he takes it for the Faculty of Reaſon it ſelf; ſometimes he takes it objectively for the Law of Nature, which he ſuppoſes to be founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things; and ſometimes he ſeems to take it for the actual Knowledge or Diſcernment Men have of that Law. Thus he objects to himſelf, p. 376. "May not the Law of Nature be very "clear, though the Light of Nature may be "ſo

" ſo very dim, as to have undeniable De-
" fects?" To which he anſwers, " Can the
" Law of Nature be clear, and the Light of
" Nature dim, when the Law of Nature is
" nothing but what the Light of Nature or
" Reaſon dictates?" Here he confounds Things that are very diſtinct, the Law and the Knowledge Men actually have of that Law. Will he ſay that the one is always as perfect as the other? He ſays often that the Law of Nature is eternal, abſolutely unchangeable, *&c.* will he ſay that the Knowledge Men have of it by their own Reaſon is ſo too? It is impoſſible for the Law of Nature to be wrong, is it impoſſible for Men's Notions of the Law to be ſo? Can there be a greater Fallacy than to argue from the one of theſe to the other? At this rate the Law of Nature is the moſt variable Thing in the World. All that any underſtand by ſaying that the Light of Nature is dim, is only that the Knowledge Men have of that Law, by their own unaſſiſted Reaſon in the preſent State of Mankind, is very imperfect and dim; and to ſay this, is no Reflexion on the Law of Nature, nor on the Obligations reſulting from the Relations of Things which continue in themſelves the ſame, however Men through their Darkneſs and Corruption be ignorant of them, or have wrong Notions concerning them. 'Tis upon the ſame wilful confounding of theſe, that the Author raiſes ſuch a Clamour againſt Dr. *Clark*, for ſuppoſing the Light of Nature to have undeniable Defects, and that this Light

was

was almoſt extinguiſh'd in the Heathen World, which is only to ſay what is evident in Fact, that Men had almoſt loſt the true Knowledge of God, and of his Worſhip and Law. And yet for only ſaying this, he muſt be repreſented as *introducing univerſal Scepticiſm*, and *weakening his own Demonſtrations of the Being and Attributes of God.*

But the Author knows how to draw an Argument from Dr. *Clark*'s aſſerting a Defect in the Light of Nature, to ſhew the Sufficiency of that Light. He argues, p. 381. "How can the Doctor know there are De-"fects in the Light of Nature but from that "Light it ſelf, which ſuppoſes this Light is "all we have to truſt to?" A ſtrange Argument, and which involves a manifeſt Inconſiſtency! as if becauſe by the Light of Nature it ſelf Men may be ſenſible of their own Defects and need of further Aſſiſtance, therefore this very Conſciouſneſs of their own Defects and need of Aſſiſtance, ſuppoſes that they have no Defects, and need no Aſſiſtance. The Light of their own Reaſon taught many of the Philoſophers their own Ignorance, and that they ſtood in need of further Inſtruction, but wou'd it not be a ſtrange Inference, that becauſe they found their Light, their Knowledge very defective, therefore they were for that Reaſon wholly to truſt to it, and ſeek no further? As if becauſe *Socrates*'s Light taught him that (as he himſelf ſaid) *he knew nothing*, this ſhew'd that he needed no further Infor-

Information, nor was capable of being taught more than he knew already. The Argument wou'd rather run thus, that if by the Light of Nature Men know that there are Defects in that Light, therefore this very Light shou'd put them upon seeking further, and looking for higher Assistances. And accordingly many of the Heathens were sensible of this, as Dr. *Clark* shews by several express Passages out of their Writings, which this Author wisely passes over.

I am afraid I shou'd be thought too tedious, if I entred into a more particular Detail of all his trifling Reasonings (for so I may justly call them) on this Subject. He seems to offer at a Stating the Question, p. 366. where after having mention'd the Account Dr. *Clark* gives of the main Principles of the Law of Nature, he tells us, the Doctor *does not object against these Principles, but against the Manner of taking them, as they are discoverable by the Light of Nature and the Reason of Things.* This is very oddly express'd, but so much we may gather from it, that he himself owns that the present Question between him and the Doctor is not concerning the Excellency or Obligation of the Law of Nature, but concerning the Manner or Means by which we may best come to the Knowledge of that Law and of those Principles; whether this may be best done by the Assistance of Divine Revelation, or by Reason alone without that Assistance. But in all that follows there is not

one Argument that is properly to this Question. To what Purpose is it to say, as this Author there does, that *the eternal Reason of Things is the original and the supreme Obligation, and the Rule by which all Men shou'd govern their Actions*? For granting that the Reason and Nature of Things must be our Rule, that is, that we are to act suitably to the Relations of Things, the Question still remains how we may best be inform'd what the Reason and Nature of Things does require, whether every Man may best discover it for himself by his own unassisted Reason, or by his Reason as assisted by Revelation? And to this what the Author here offers is wholly impertinent. He artfully slips the present Question, which is (as he himself had put it) about the Manner of discovering or taking in the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature; and speaks to another, *viz.* on Supposition that *there is any Difference between the eternal Reason of Things and external Revelation, which of these must take place?* and argues, that "so far as Men take any "other Rule than the eternal Reason of "Things, so far they lose of their Perfection "by ceasing to be govern'd by that Rule, "in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imi-"tation of the perfect Will of God. But the Opposition here ought not to be put, as he unfairly puts it, between the eternal Reason of Things and external Revelation, which in that Case ought to be preferr'd; for it will be easily granted, that no true Divine Reve-

Revelation can contradict the eternal Reason of Things; but the Opposition is as to the Manner of discovering those Duties and Obligations which are founded in the Nature of Things, between the Discovery made by meer unassisted Reason, and the Discovery made by Reason assisted by Revelation; by which of these ways the Bulk of Mankind may best come to a right Knowledge of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature? And if they can come to a more perfect Knowledge and Discovery of those Principles and Obligations by external Revelation, than they cou'd have obtain'd without it, it is evident that by following that Revelation they are so far from ceasing to be govern'd by the Reason and Nature of Things, that they are more perfectly govern'd by it than they wou'd be without that Revelation; because on this Supposition they know the Reason and Relations of Things, or the Fitnesses and Duties arising from them, more perfectly than they wou'd do without such a Revelation.

But, says he, speaking of the Deists, "It "is impossible for them (since there can't be "two Originals of the same Thing) to chuse "that Religion from external Revelation, "which they have already chosen from in-"ternal Revelation." That is, supposing that which is the Question, *viz.* that Men have already a full and clear Knowledge of the whole of their Duty antecedently to Revelation, they can't be said to owe that Knowledge to Revelation, which they had alrea-

dy without it; this will be granted; but this is the very Point in queſtion, whether Men can as eaſily and certainly come to a clear and full Knowledge of the whole of their Duty, if left meerly to gather it themſelves by their own Reaſon without an external Revelation, as they may by the Aſſiſtance of ſuch a Revelation. And it is evident the Author here offers nothing to decide that Queſtion.

Nor is what he further offers much more to the Purpoſe, when he adds, p. 369. "that "if external Revelation can't alter the Na- "ture of Things, and make that to be fit "which is in it ſelf unfit, or make that ne- "ceſſary which is in it ſelf unneceſſary, it "can only be a Tranſcript of the Law of "Nature." For though Revelation can't alter the Nature of Things, it may give us a clearer Knowledge of the Nature and Relations of Things and the Duties ariſing from them, than we ſhou'd have had without it. It can't change the Nature of our Duty, but it may inſtruct us better in it. Though it can't make that fit which is in it ſelf unfit, or that neceſſary which is in it ſelf unneceſſary, yet it may diſcover that to be fit and neceſſary for us in our preſent State and Circumſtances, which otherwiſe we ſhou'd not have known, or at leaſt not ſo clearly and certainly known to be fit and neceſſary. And when he adds, that therefore *Revelation can only be a Tranſcript of the Law of Nature*, without inquiring at preſent how far it may be ſaid

to

to be only a Transcript of the Law of Nature, I shall only observe that if it be such a Transcript as sets it in a fairer and clearer Light, and renders it more obvious and legible to the Bulk of Mankind, this alone would be sufficient to shew the Usefulness and Advantage of Revelation, and nothing that he here offers does at all prove the contrary.

He goes on to argue, that "Men must "now, as well as formerly, judge of the "Will of God by the Reason given them by "an all-gracious God to distinguish between "Good and Evil; and that every thing in "external Revelation must be judg'd of by "the Reason and Nature of Things, otherwise we might be oblig'd to admit Things "necessarily false, p. 369." This Argument he repeats in several Forms in many Parts of his Book, where he often talks of the Law of Nature's being the Test by which all traditional Revelations must be tried, which supposes that we must know the Law of Nature antecedently to Revelation, and then we need no Revelation to discover it to us. But the Fallacy of this boasted Argument will easily appear if it be consider'd, that if it were good for any thing it wou'd prove, that because it is by our Reason that we must judge of and understand all Books whatsoever, and must never admit any thing in any Book that is contrary to the evident Dictates of Reason, therefore no Book whatsoever can ever instruct us in any thing but what we actually knew, or might as easily have known without

out

out it; and conſequently that all other Books are uſeleſs as well as the Scriptures. Thus if any Man, upon reading Sir *Iſaac Newton's Principia*, or his *Opticks*, judges that the Principles he has advanc'd, and his Reaſonings upon them, are juſt and true, it proves that that Man actually knew all thoſe Things before he read them there, or might as eaſily have found them out himſelf; and conſequently that all his ſublime Diſcoveries were as well known before he writ as after. At this rate there never was or cou'd be any new Diſcoveries; for Reaſon muſt judge of them whether they be true or not; and if we muſt judge of them by our Reaſon, it proves according to our Author that we knew them by our Reaſon before. Such is the Strain of this Gentleman's arguing, and which wou'd ſcarce be endur'd on any other Subject. But any thing can go down, when it is deſign'd to ſhew there is no need or uſe of a Revelation, though the ſame Argument wou'd prove that there is no need or uſe of any Books in the World, and that no Man ever ſaid any thing in Books, but what all his Readers knew as well before. But need any Man be told, that there are many Things that when diſcover'd to us ſeem perfectly juſt and reaſonable, and agreeable to the Nature of Things, yea ſeem very plain and evident, which yet without ſuch a Diſcovery we ſhou'd not have known, nor cou'd have ever found out of our ſelves? Though therefore it is by the Reaſon God hath given us, or by our rational Faculties, that we are

to

to judge of the Revelation, and are not to admit any thing contrary to the evident Principles of Reason, it does not follow that therefore that Revelation cannot inform us of any thing but what we might by our own Reason have discover'd as well and as easily without it.

Thus have I consider'd what our Author offers, where he seems to aim at a stating the Question concerning the best Manner of our coming at the Knowledge of the Law of Nature; and where therefore it might be expected, that he shou'd have argued to the Purpose, and with the greatest Strength.

There are many other Things scatter'd thro' his Book, and which he advances with great Pomp and Flourish, to shew that the Law of Nature must needs be so obvious to every Man, that it cannot be made clearer by any external Revelation. Thus he argues, that no Man can be ignorant of the Law of Nature, because no Man can transgress that Law, without condemning himself, and acting contrary to the Judgment of his own Mind. "That "natural Religion is so deeply impress'd on "Men's Minds, that they can't violate its "Precepts without Self-condemnation, p. 383. And he cites a Passage from the Dean of *Sarum* to this Purpose, "that every Man is "endued with such a Sense and Judgment "of the Reasonableness and Fitness of con-"forming his Actions to the Law of Nature "or moral Law, that he cannot but in his "own Mind acquit himself when he does

"so,

" ſo, and condemn himſelf when he does o-
" therwiſe." But this Rule does not hold, except it be explain'd thus, that every Man is ſo ſenſible of the Reaſonableneſs and Fitneſs of the moral Law, when made known, and as far as it is known to him, that he cannot but acquit himſelf when he is conſcious that he conforms his Actions to that Law, and condemn himſelf when he knows he does otherwiſe. But 'tis certain that a Man may counter-act that Law in very flagrant Inſtances without condemning himſelf, if at the ſame Time he is ignorant that he counter-acts it; and this has often been the Caſe.

It appears from a Paſſage here produc'd by our Author from the ſame learned Writer, and which he ſeems to approve as containing his own Sentiments, that the Duties we owe to God are as evidently founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things, and therefore are as much a Part of the Law of Nature as any Duties we owe to our ſelves or each other; and that therefore Idolatry and Superſtition are as really a Breach of the Law of Nature, and as contrary to the Ideas of Comelineſs and Decency, as Injuſtice, Oppreſſion, and Ingratitude towards Men; yet we don't find that the Heathens reproach'd and condemn'd themſelves for their Idolatry and Superſtition, or that in this they acted contrary to the Judgment of their own Minds, but rather thought they were doing right, and yielding an acceptable Worſhip to the Deity. I believe our Author himſelf will ſay, that to perſecute o-

thers,

thers, meerly for their religious Sentiments, is a Breach of the Law of Nature, and yet it cannot be denied that many have done it, not only without reproaching themselves on that Account, but have thought that in this they did God good Service. I think it is contrary to the Law of Nature to expose and destroy weak and sickly Infants, yet it was the Custom in *Sparta*, commanded by the celebrated Laws of *Lycurgus*, approved by *Plutarch* in the Life of that Law-giver, and which was frequently practis'd in *Rome* itself; and we don't find that in this they thought they did wrong, but rather that they look'd upon it to be a very prudent and justifiable Practice. Theft and Rapine is contrary to the Law of Nature, and yet in some Nations it was so far from being regarded as a Crime, that it was accounted glorious and honourable, as *Herodotus* tells us of the ancient *Thracians* and *Greeks*, *Lib. 5. Cap. 6.* And *Thucidides* saith the same concerning the ancient *Barbarians* and *Grecians* in the Islands and on the Continent, that they lived chiefly upon Theft and Rapine, that way of living being then rather accounted glorious than shameful, *Lib. 1.* I mention only these Instances, to which many others might easily be added, to shew that it is a false Principle which this Author advances, that no Man can violate the Law of Nature without condemning himself, and acting contrary to the Judgment of his own Mind, and consequently that the Argument he draws from it to shew that no Man

can be ignorant of the Law of Nature falls to the Ground.

I need not take particular Notice of the Arguments the Author brings from the Divine Goodneſs, to ſhew that the Law of Nature muſt be at all Times known to all Mankind. For if it be evident in Fact, that the greateſt Part of Mankind are ignorant of the Law of Nature in ſome important Articles of it, no Argument can be brought from the Divine Goodneſs (in judging of which we may eaſily be miſtaken) to prove that in Fact it is not ſo. Does not this Gentleman himſelf ſuppoſe, that Mankind have in all Ages been involv'd in Superſtition, a monſtrous Evil which he looks upon to be worſe than Atheiſm? And yet I believe he will hardly ſay that this State of Things is inconſiſtent with the Divine Goodneſs, for this wou'd be directly to ſay that God is not good. This Superſtition, according to our Author, argues very unworthy Apprehenſions of the ſupreme Being, (as he frequently ſhews in his eighth Chapter) and therefore it argues very wrong Notions of the Law of Nature. So that, by this Gentleman's own Acknowledgment, almoſt all Mankind in all Ages have had very unworthy Apprehenſions of God, and very wrong Notions of the Religion of Nature, and therefore there has been and is a great Darkneſs upon Mankind. Why therefore ſhou'd he ſo often repreſent thoſe that ſpeak of that Darkneſs and Corruption, as highly reflecting on the Wiſdom and Goodneſs

ness of God, when he himself must acknowledge it as well as they? 'Tis true this Darkness of Error and Superstition is not owing to God, but to Men themselves; he did not bring them into it, but they brought themselves into it by an Abuse of their own Reason; but supposing them once fallen into such a State of Darkness and Superstition and Error, it will be very hard for them to extricate themselves out of it, as all that are acquainted with human Nature and the History of Mankind well know. If therefore God has *given all Men a plain Rule for their Conduct*, (as this Author speaks, p. 379.) yet it is evident in Fact that that which was originally and in it self plain to right unprejudic'd Reason, is to Reason that is corrupted with vicious Prejudices become so obscure, that the Generality of Mankind, taking them as they are, do not in fact know it in its just Extent, nor indeed, speaking according to the common Course of Things and Temper of Mankind, cou'd be expected to come to the right Knowledge of it without Assistance; and on this Supposition it can scarce be denied that an external Revelation might be of great Use, and that Men might more easily come to know their Duty by the Help of such a Revelation, than by their own Reason without it.

Before I quit this Subject, I shall say something as to the Method the Author proposes by which Persons of the meanest Capacity may easily come to a right Knowledge of their Duty in all its important Branches.

Sometimes indeed he ſpeaks as if he thought all Men knew it by a kind of natural Senſe and Intuition, that needs very little Reflexion. Many of the Paſſages produc'd above look this way. Thus he quotes a Paſſage from Lord *Shaftsbury*, concerning the natural Beauty of Actions as well as Figures; and it will be eaſily granted, that there is a Grace and Harmony in them to a well-diſpos'd Mind. He adds, that "no ſooner are Actions view'd, no ſoon-"er the human Affections and Paſſions diſ-"cern'd (and they are moſt of them diſcern'd "as ſoon as felt) than ſtrait an inward Eye "diſtinguiſhes, and ſees the fair and ſhapely, "the amiable and admirable, apart from the "deformed, the foul, the odious, or the de-"ſpicable." But I think it cannot be denied by any that conſider the preſent State of Mankind, that *the inward Eye*, the Eye of the Mind is very much vitiated and obſcur'd, and there are many Things that hinder its juſt Diſcernment. Is there not as natural as demonſtrable a Grace and Beauty in the Actions of the Creature towards God as towards its Fellow-Creatures, and yet do all Men in this Caſe immediately diſcern by the inward Eye, what is fair and ſhapely and amiable, apart from what is foul and odious and deform'd? Whence is it then that Men in all Ages have been ſo apt to miſtake Superſtition, than which nothing, this Author being Judge, is more foul, more odious, and deform'd, for that which is the moſt amiable Thing in the World, true Religion and Piety?

And

And even with relation to the Duties Men owe to one another, and the Conduct of their Passions and Appetites, how often have they been mistaken in their Notions of the *fair*, the *amiable*, and *admirable*, apart from the *deformed*, the *foul*, the *odious*? Those very Passions and Affections, the Beauty or Deformity of which he makes to be for the most part *discern'd as soon as felt*, do often impose upon the Reason, and lead it to form a wrong Judgment in important Instances, and hinder it from a just Discernment. When therefore he adds, that the *Discernment*, viz. of moral Beauty and Fitness, and the contrary, is *natural and from Nature alone*; it must be own'd that this Discernment is now much weakned and obscur'd. It is not so from *Nature alone* as not to need great Helps to assist, to cultivate, to clear and improve it. There is a Passage of *Cicero* to this Purpose, so remarkable that it well deserves to be taken notice of on this Occasion; it is in his third Book of Tusculan Questions: *Si tales nos natura genuisset ut eam ipsam intueri & perspicere, eaque optima duce cursum vitæ conficere possemus, haud esset sanè quod quisquam rationem & doctrinam requireret*, &c. Where he observes, that *if we had come into the World in such Circumstances,, that we cou'd clearly see and discern Nature it self, and under its own excellent Directions finish the Course of our Lives, there wou'd have been no need of Learning or Instruction*; but he goes on to shew that this is not the

the Caſe. He ſpeaks of ſome *ſmall Sparks or Seeds of Virtue implanted in us*, which are *ſoon extinguiſh'd by corrupt Cuſtoms and Opinions, ſo that the Light of Nature no where appears*, viz. in its Incorruption and Purity; from whence he infers the great Neceſſity and Uſefulneſs of Philoſophy to direct and to aſſiſt us; and it will conclude much more ſtrongly for the Uſefulneſs of a Divine Revelation, which is much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

And indeed though our Author ſometimes ſpeaks, as if he thought Men knew the whole of natural Religion by Intuition, or by a kind of inward Senſe and Inſtinct, without any further Inquiry, yet at other Times when he comes to explain himſelf, all that he ſeems to underſtand by the Law of Nature's being *implanted in the Hearts of all Men, impreſs'd on Men's Minds continually*, and the like Expreſſions, comes to no more than this, that all Men have natural Abilities, if they improve their Reaſon to the utmoſt, and uſe that Conſideration and Reflexion that becomes them in an Affair of ſuch Conſequence, to find out the great Principles of natural Religion. Thus in his firſt Chapter, where he talks of the Law of Nature's being implanted in Man from the Beginning, he affirms that "it is only by making a due "Uſe of our Reaſon, by our uſing our ra-"tional Faculties after the beſt manner we "can, that we can come to underſtand the "Law of Nature, p. 5, 6." And again, he calls

calls it "an universal Law, given by the su-
"preme Governor of Mankind to his Sub-
"jects, and which they when they come to
"the Use of their Reason are capable of
"knowing, p. 9." So that this implanting and writing in the Hearts of all Men the Law of Nature, this impressing it daily on their Minds, and dictating it daily to them, (which he so often talks of) amounts to no more than this, that when they come to the Use of their Reason they are capable of knowing it; and this they may be, and yet without particular Teaching and Instruction wou'd not actually know it; the Knowledge of it may notwithstanding this be attended with great Difficulty.

One of the Ways our Author proposes, whereby the Bulk of Mankind may come to a right Knowledge of their Duty, is by a Consideration of the Divine Attributes. He observes, that "the Knowledge of God lies
"at the Foundation of all Religion, and
"that to argue from the Divine Attributes
"is a most certain way of arguing; and
"therefore he directs us in the first place to
"get clear Ideas of God, especially of the
"moral Character of the Divine Being. For
"that Reason which gives us a Demonstra-
"tion of the Divine Perfections, affords us
"the same concerning the Nature of those
"Duties God requires." But are all these Things so clear, that the Bulk of Mankind can easily discern them of themselves, without Assistance or Instruction? Must they

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be left, by the Dint of their own Reaſon, to work out the Demonſtration of the Divine Attributes for themſelves? Muſt every Man, the meaneſt of the People, be ſuppos'd to have ſuch clear Notions of the Deity and of his glorious Perfections, as to know what Duties he requires; or is there any thing in which the Bulk of Mankind have been more generally wrong, and apt to entertain the moſt falſe and debaſing Notions, than in what relates to the Deity, his Attributes, and the Worſhip and Service that it is proper to render to him?

But he thinks that all Perſons may eaſily and ſafely argue from the Divine Goodneſs, that here there is no Difficulty. He tells us, "There is none of the Queſtions, whether "relating to God or Man, but what may be "eaſily determin'd by conſidering which ſide "of the Queſtion carries with it the greateſt "Goodneſs, ſince the ſame Light of Reaſon "which ſhews us there is ſuch a good Being, "ſhews us alſo what ſuch Goodneſs expects, p. 75. But it is not meerly to be conſider'd what carries with it the greateſt Goodneſs, but what is all Things to be conſider'd moſt juſt, moſt wiſe, moſt worthy of God; Wiſdom and Juſtice are to be conſider'd as well as Goodneſs, and he that wou'd form to himſelf an Idea of God, meerly under the Character of a beneficent Being, wou'd form a very imperfect and partial one. Beſides we may in many Inſtances be eaſily miſtaken in judging which ſide carries with it the greateſt

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Goodneſs. The Goodneſs of God *has a Relation to the whole*, as Lord *Shaftsbury* expreſſes it in a Paſſage cited by this Author, p. 78. and is it ſo very eaſy to judge in all Caſes what is for the general Good of the whole? May we not be partial in our own Caſe, and judge by our own private Good, and not the Good of the whole, what it is that the Goodneſs of the ſupreme Being leads him to? External Revelation therefore may be of great Uſe, to let us know in many Caſes how far his Goodneſs extends, and what it requires and expects. This Author himſelf is a remarkable Inſtance how eaſily Perſons may be miſtaken in arguing from the Divine Goodneſs, ſince the Inferences he draws from it may be prov'd (as I hope to ſhew afterwards) to be ſubverſive of all Religion, and even of that Law of Nature, which he pretends ſo much to magnify and admire.

Another Rule this Gentleman propoſes, by which the People may eaſily judge of the whole of their Duty, is by what tends to their own Happineſs. "The only innate "Principle (ſays he) in Man, is the Deſire "of his own Happineſs; and the Good-"neſs of God requires no more than a right "cultivating this Principle, in preferring a ge-"neral or publick to a particular or private "Good: And where there are two Evils, "and both can't be avoided, to chuſe the "leſs, *ſub ratione boni*, p. 363." Theſe Things are eaſily ſaid in general; but if we

conſider them more particularly and diſtinctly, we ſhall find ſeveral Things here mention'd which are of no ſmall Difficulty. Not to inquire at preſent how far that is true which the Author here advances, that the only innate Principle in Man is the Deſire of his own Happineſs, it is not ſo very eaſy as he repreſents it to know which is the right way of cultivating this Principle. Nor is there any thing in which Men are more apt to be deceiv'd, nor concerning which they have form'd more wrong Notions, than wherein the true and proper Happineſs of Man conſiſts. Every one knows how the Heathen World were divided on this Head, and what a great Variety of Opinions there was amongſt their wiſe Men and Philoſophers themſelves about it.

If the People ſhou'd come to the Author to know how they ſhall promote their Happineſs, he directs them *ſo to regulate their natural Appetites, as will conduce moſt to the Exerciſe of their Reaſon, the Health of their Bodies, and the Pleaſure of their Senſes, taken and conſider'd together, ſince therein their Happineſs conſiſts*, p. 17. And is it ſo very eaſy for the Vulgar to weigh and compare all theſe, and to form an exact Judgment accordingly? How much more eaſily and certainly might they find out their Duty and Happineſs by ſome plain expreſs Revelation from God, determining their Duty, and inſtructing them wherein true Happineſs conſiſts, and which is the beſt way to obtain it,

it, than if they were left to themſelves to collect it by conſidering and comparing all theſe? But beſides this, he wou'd have 'em further to conſider and *compare the general or publick with their own particular or private Good*, and to *prefer* the former. But if the *only innate Principle in Man is the Deſire of his own Happineſs* (as this Gentleman alledges) I don't ſee what Obligations a Man is under to prefer the general or publick to his own private Good, ſuppoſing theſe to come in Competition; nor is it ſo very eaſy for the People to judge of what is for the general or publick Good, as I ſhall ſhew preſently. Laſtly, he wou'd have 'em *of two Evils to chuſe the leſſer ſub ratione boni.* They muſt therefore exactly compare theſe two Evils, and paſs a right Judgment concerning them; but what if they judge thoſe to be the greateſt Evils, which bring ſome preſent Inconvenience to their Bodies or Eſtates, as the Generality of Mankind are apt to do?

This Author himſelf is an Inſtance how eaſily this Rule may be miſtaken. He allows Perſons to tell a Falſhood, to get rid of the *Impertinence* of inquiſitive People; ſee p. 347. He muſt therefore look upon it as a greater Evil to be teiz'd a little with the Forwardneſs of *impertinent* People than to tell a Lie, and therefore is for chuſing the latter *ſub ratione boni.* But many others think differently from him in this, and that to tell a Lie (which they look upon to be a moral

Evil) is a greater Evil than to be ſubject to a little Inconvenience.

Another Rule this Author propoſes is, that "we can't but know, if we in the leaſt conſider, that whatever Circumſtances Men "are plac'd in by the univerſal Cauſe of all "Things, 'tis his eternal and immutable Will "by his placing them in thoſe Circumſtances, that they act as theſe require." And he adds, that "this Conſideration alone will "direct a Man how to act in all Conditions "of Life." Thus ſays he, "we ſee how the "Reaſon of Things, or the Relation they "have to each other, teaches us our Duty "in all Caſes whatſoever, p. 19." To the ſame Purpoſe is his boaſted Rule, the Uſefulneſs of which he ſo highly extols, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes "them good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happineſs are always good; "and thoſe that have a contrary Influence "are always bad. And 'tis the Circumſtances Men are under, by which we are to "judge of the Tendency of Actions, p. 345. "*&c.*

Theſe are the ſimple and eaſy Rules this Gentleman propoſes, by which the Bulk of Mankind may eaſily and certainly know their Duty in all Caſes whatſoever. As if it were ſufficient only to tell them it is the Will of God they ſhou'd act as the Circumſtances they are plac'd in do require, and then to leave them to find out of themſelves as well as they can, what their ſeveral Circumſtances demand

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and make it fit for them to do? But if every Man must be left to himself, to judge of what is good by what suits his own Circumstances, and what he apprehends for his own greater Pleasure, or Interest, or Gain in the Circumstances he is in, it wou'd soon introduce a very loose Morality.

But perhaps the other Rule he advances, p. 360. may prevent any ill Use that might be made of this; he wou'd have Men make "a "Rule's being calculated for the general "Good, the Test of its being the Will of "God; and that this Rule, if observ'd, wou'd "make the World happy, *ibid.* But neither is this Rule so very clear and easy, as to afford a sufficient Direction to the Bulk of Mankind. It looks plausible in the general, but is not so clear and easy, when applied to particular Cases. Many have thought it for the general Good that Fornication shou'd be prohibited, others have pleaded for the Lawfulness of it; and it is very probable, from some Passages in his Book, that our Author thinks the latter are in the right. Some have thought that a Community of Wives wou'd be for the general Good of the Commonwealth, (so thought the famous Philosopher *Plato*) others very justly have thought the contrary. Some have thought it for the general Good, that weak and sickly Children shou'd be expos'd, (as in the Commonwealth of *Sparta*) others very justly have look'd upon this as a very barbarous and inhuman Custom Some have thought Self-murder in many Cases lawful, and even commend-

commendable, others have thought it for the general Good that no ſuch thing ſhou'd be allow'd. Many have thought upon very good Reaſons, that thoſe Precepts of our Saviour concerning forgiving Injuries, and loving or doing good to our Enemies, are highly for the general Good of Mankind; but our Author ſeems to be of a contrary Opinion, p. 340, 341, 342. Some have thought it for the general Good that all Men ſhou'd be brought to a ſtrict Uniformity in Worſhip, and no Toleration allow'd to thoſe of different Sentiments from the Religion of the State, which they thought made way for Seditions and Diſtractions; others have thought a Toleration of different Opinions, and a Liberty of profeſſing them, for the publick Good. Many have thought it for the general Good that a Lie ſhou'd not be allow'd on any Occaſion; others, and among the reſt this Author, think that it may be for the general Good to tranſgreſs the Rules of Truth on ſeveral Occaſions. It has been the common Opinion, that Virtue is for the general Good of Mankind; but there have not been wanting Men, and thoſe too admir'd in this diſcerning Age, this Age of Liberty and Free-thought, that have made no ſcruple to aſſert, and have endeavour'd to prove, that Vice it ſelf is for the general Good of the Community, and that *private Vices are publick Benefits*. Indeed it is certain in fact, that the Bulk of Mankind, if left to themſelves to judge what is for the general Good, will not trouble themſelves much a-

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bout it; it is a Thing that for the moſt part lies out of their Reach, and of which they are not very competent Judges. It muſt therefore be a great Advantage not to have our Duty left thus at large, but particularly determin'd by God, who is a far better Judge than Man can pretend to be of what tends to the general Good, as he takes in the whole Compaſs of Things. And it muſt be a great Satisfaction, and of ſignal Benefit, to be inform'd by a Revelation from him what does ſo.

Upon the whole, what this Gentleman moſt frequently propoſes as the Method by which all Mankind may eaſily and certainly come to the Knowledge of their Duty is, by *conſidering and comparing Things, and the Relations they ſtand in to one another*; it is by this we muſt judge *of the Fitneſs and Unfitneſs of Actions*; and he tells us, that by *conſidering the Relation we ſtand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and the Duties reſulting from thence, we may know the whole of our Duty*, p. 28. And is this ſo very eaſy a Work for the Generality of Mankind? They are to have a right Knowledge of God and his glorious Attributes and Perfections; they are to know themſelves and the Relations they ſtand in to one another; they are to conſider and compare theſe ſeveral Relations, and to know what they require. And is this a Work of no Difficulty? Are all theſe Things ſelf-evident? Or does it not require deep Attention and ſerious Thought?

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And has it not employ'd the moſt conſidering Men in all Ages to ſet theſe Things in a proper Light? Do we not find in fact, that where no Care has been taken to inſtruct Men in theſe Things, they are ſunk into Barbariſm, and amazingly ignorant of God and their Duty in many important Inſtances? Are all theſe Things ſo plain, that Men need no Inſtruction, no Aſſiſtance to a right Diſcernment of them? Or does he know human Nature that talks at this rate?

This Writer cites many Paſſages from ſeveral Authors, to ſhew the Clearneſs of the Law of Nature; and particularly he has a long one from Mr. *Barbeyrac*, p. 296, 297. which he repreſents as containing a *Recapitulation* or Summary of what he had been advancing. Mr. *Barbeyrac* there ſays amongſt other Things, that "the *Stoicks*, "who made Morality their principal Study, "maintain'd that their Philoſophy was not "above the Reach of Women and Slaves. But then they did not ſuppoſe it ſo plain, that thoſe Women and Slaves needed not to be inſtructed in it; they thought the Writings of Philoſophers, particularly their own, very uſeful. For why did they write Books, but to inſtruct Mankind in their Duty? Many Things appear very plain and clear, when once Men are inſtructed in them, which yet they wou'd never have found out of themſelves without ſuch Inſtruction. Beſides I think it might eaſily be ſhewn, that the *Stoick* Philoſophy was not ſo very clear and obvious

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to the Vulgar. It was in some Things false, and in others very obscure, as many have shewn, particularly *Plutarch* in his two Treatises against the *Stoicks*.

I grant what Mr. *Barbeyrac* there says, that "*the natural Principles of the Science* "*of Morality, are such as are proportion-* "*ate to the Capacities of all Sorts of Per-* "*sons*, that is, they are such as they are capable of understanding, when clearly explain'd and laid before them; and yet this does not prove but that they may have great need of Teaching and Instruction. Besides, supposing the main *Principles* of that Science clear, are the Conclusions from those Principles equally evident, in which yet the greatest Part of practical Morality does consist? He tells us indeed, that "the Idea of a Creator, bound- "less in Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, and "the Idea of our selves, as intelligent, rea- "sonable and sociable Creatures, these two "Ideas well look'd into and compar'd toge- "ther in their whole Extent, will always fur- "nish us with steddy Grounds of Duty, and "sure Rules of Conduct, *&c.*" But the two Ideas he mentions are very complex, and comprehend a great deal under them; the Ideas of God and of the Divine Attributes, and of our own Intelligence, Rationality, Sociality, *&c.* are not so very obvious to the Generality of Mankind, that if left to themselves they wou'd easily form just Notions concerning them, much less *compare them together in their whole Extent*, as *Barbeyrac* requires.

Is this a Task ſo eaſy for the Vulgar, even for thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities, and that cannot ſo much as read in their Mother-Tongue, that they may underſtand them all without Difficulty, meerly by their own Study and the Force of their own Reaſon? Are theſe Things ſo plain, that all Treatiſes of Morality are needleſs? Or are not thoſe very Treatiſes, where theſe Things are argued from their Principles, for the moſt part above the Capacity of the Vulgar, who can much more eaſily underſtand the plain and ſimple Precepts of Holy Writ, than the abſtract Reaſonings of the Moraliſts, though ready prepar'd to their Hand? Much leſs wou'd they be able to reaſon theſe Things out to themſelves by their own natural Sagacity, without further Aſſiſtance. Though therefore, as *Barbeyrac* there ſays, "God's Laws are not environ'd "with ſuch Obſcurity, as cannot be penetra-"ted by one who really has his Duty at "Heart, notwithſtanding all his Pains and "Application," yet ſince, taking Mankind as they are, they are not generally fitted for ſuch deep Inquiries or ſuch Application as is neceſſary, it is a great Advantage to have an external Revelation from God to diſcover to them their Duty, which in this Method they may come to know far more clearly and eaſily and certainly than if they had been left to collect it every Man for himſelf by his own proper Study and Application. And accordingly *Barbeyrac* himſelf, in the Paſſage here cited by our Author, mentions it to the Glory of the

the Goſpel-Revelation, that it has brought a clear Diſcovery of pure Morals.

And now ſince it has been ſhewn, that Men do not know the Law of Nature in its juſt Extent, or the whole of their Duty by a natural Senſe and Intuition, and that the Principles and Obligations of that Law do not come in with an irreſiſtible Light and Evidence; ſince the Author himſelf though he ſometimes ſpeaks as if he thought all Men knew the whole Law of Nature naturally and neceſſarily, yet at other Times plainly ſuppoſes that it is by attentive Conſideration, by conſidering and comparing the Relations of Things, and the Fitneſſes ariſing from them, that they muſt come to know that Law; ſince it appears that the Generality of Mankind are little fitted for ſuch Inquiries; that they are ſo little uſed to abſtract Speculations, and have ſo little Leiſure for them, and are ſo careleſs and inconſiderate, and under the Power of ſuch Prejudices, that it can ſcarce ordinarily be expected, but that, if left meerly to themſelves, they muſt be ignorant of ſome Things that are of Conſequence to their Duty and their Happineſs; and ſince it is plain in fact, that where Men have been left meerly to themſelves, they have ſcarce ever made a right Uſe of their Reaſon for finding out the main Principles of natural Religion; ſince all this is manifeſt, and hath been ſufficiently prov'd, it muſt be own'd that the Bulk of Mankind ſtand in need of particular Inſtruction, and

conſequently that the World wou'd be under great Obligations to any that ſhou'd endeavour to recover them to a right Knowledge of God and of their Duty. This Writer, it is to be preſum'd, will grant this, ſince this is the profeſſed Deſign of his whole Book, which he himſelf thinks a very laudable Attempt, and ſeems to expect that others ſhou'd think ſo too. And he ſays *we are infinitely oblig'd to the Philoſophers for writing as they have done*, that is, for endeavouring to aſſiſt Men in the right Knowledge of the Law of Nature, and to inſpire them with worthy Notions of God, and ingage them to the Practice of Virtue. And if their Attempts, notwithſtanding the ſuppos'd Sufficiency of the Light of Nature, were neither needleſs nor uſeleſs; I think this Author muſt own, if he be conſiſtent with himſelf, that if God ſhou'd condeſcend to ſend ſome Perſons in his Name, on purpoſe to inſtruct Mankind in a far better Manner, and with more Certainty and Authority than the Philoſophers did, and to recover them out of that Darkneſs and Superſtition in which they were involv'd; and if in order to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and procure a greater Regard to the Inſtructions given by theſe Men in his Name, he ſhou'd enable them to perform many illuſtrious Miracles, plainly exceeding human Power, and bearing upon them the Characters of a Divine Power and Goodneſs; if he ſhou'd do this, we muſt be under great Obligations to the Divine Goodneſs, and ought

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to accept and acknowledge the Benefit with the higheſt Thankfulneſs to God, and a due Regard to the Inſtruments made uſe of in this excellent Work. And it is evident that on ſuch a View of Things, ſuch an external Revelation wou'd be neither needleſs nor uſeleſs. And ſince the Author repreſents it as *the Buſineſs of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation to reſtore, free from all Idolatry, the true primitive and natural Religion implanted in Mankind from the Creation*, p. 379. This ought (if he were ſincere in this Acknowledgment) highly to recommend it to his Eſteem; but whether he be or not, 'tis certain this was one noble Deſign and Effect of it. Where Chriſtianity came, the Pagan Superſtition and Idolatry, which was ſo firmly eſtabliſh'd, and had prevail'd for ſo many Ages, fled before it. Great Numbers of the People were turn'd from worſhipping vain Idols to the living and true God, and from all the barbarous and impure Rites to which they were ſo ſtrongly addicted, to a pure and ſimple and ſpiritual Adoration, and from thoſe vicious Exceſſes in which they freely indulg'd themſelves before, to an exemplary Purity of Heart and Behaviour. Other Means had been long tried in vain; Philoſophy had been tried to the utmoſt for many Ages, and found ineffectual. Thoſe wiſe Men never converted ſo much as a ſingle Village from Superſtition and Idolatry. And indeed how cou'd it be expected they ſhou'd, when

when they themſelves fell in with the common Superſtition, and either were ignorant of the Evil of it, or were afraid of expoſing themſelves to Danger by oppoſing it? Thus Superſtition and Corruption ſtill grew and prevail'd, and both had arriv'd to the Height when Chriſtianity appear'd; and if Mankind had been left meerly to themſelves, to the Force of their own Reaſon, to break thro' all thoſe Prejudices, and recover the primitive Religion, or if they had been left meerly to the Inſtructions of their own Philoſophers, their wiſe Men and Law-givers, Paganiſm in all Probability wou'd have continued to this Day. 'Tis evident there needed others of greater Influence than the Philoſophers to reform Mankind, and reclaim them from their Superſtition and Idolatry and Corruption of Manners. And what greater Influence cou'd they hope for, unleſs animated by a Divine Power, endued with an heroick Fortitude, and producing the evident Proofs of an Authority and Commiſſion from above? Such were the Apoſtles, whoſe Inſtructions accordingly immediately produc'd the moſt wonderful Effects for reſcuing Mankind from the miſerable Superſtition they were under. Inſtructed by them, Thouſands of the meaneſt of the People were brought to entertain juſt Notions of God and of his Attributes, and of the great Duties of Morality, and of a future State; and the Revelation they brought, and which is contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, ſtill is the beſt Security againſt the Return or Preva-

Prevalency of Idolatry and Superſtition. 'Tis true there has been in fact a great Corruption among Chriſtians themſelves; Superſtition and Idolatry has been in effect introduc'd under a Chriſtian Name; but it does not follow that the Corruption of Chriſtians wou'd be as good an Argument for a new Revelation to them, as the Corruption and Superſtition of Pagans was for the Expediency of an external Revelation for recovering them out of their Superſtition; becauſe whilſt the Chriſtian Revelation does ſubſiſt in the Holy Scriptures, Men may eaſily, by having recourſe to it, diſcover and reject all the corrupt Additions that have been made to it; even the meaneſt of the People, by reading the Scriptures, may diſtinguiſh between true Religion and Superſtition, incomparably better and more eaſily than they cou'd if left meerly to their own Reaſon without it. Thus we find in fact it was at the Reformation; the People, by reading the Scriptures, were enabled to throw off the Yoke of Superſtition and Idolatry, from which otherwiſe, if left to themſelves, they wou'd not have recover'd; and therefore in Popiſh Countries, it is a wiſe Part of their Policy to hinder the Laity from reading the Scriptures.

Thus have I conſider'd the Clearneſs of the Law of Nature, with reſpect to the Duties there requir'd; and have ſhewn, that though thoſe Duties be in themſelves moſt reaſonable, and founded in the Nature of Things, yet they are not ſo clear to the Generality of Mankind in their preſent State, as to render

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an external Revelation uſeleſs, and that by the Help of ſuch a Revelation they may more eaſily and certainly come to a right Knowledge of thoſe Duties and Obligations, than if every Man was left to collect his Duty himſelf by the meer Force of his own Reaſon, without ſuch Aſſiſtance.

CHAP. VI.

That there are ſome Things of great Importance to us to know, particularly relating to the Methods of our Reconciliation with God when we have offended him, and the Reward to be conferr'd on imperfect Obedience, which cannot be certainly known by the meer Light of Nature without Revelation.

THOUGH we ſhou'd ſuppoſe the great Principles and Duties of Morality to be never ſo clear and evident to the Bulk of Mankind, yet there are other Things which it is of conſiderable Importance to us to have a clear and ſatisfying Knowledge and Aſſurance of, and with reſpect to which an external Revelation might be of ſignal Uſe. It cannot be denied

denied that in the present State of the World and of Mankind, we stand in need of many powerful Motives to ingage us to the Practice of those moral Duties that are incumbent upon us, from which we are often in Danger of being discourag'd by the many Difficulties we meet with, and of being drawn aside by the Strength of our Appetites and Passions, by the Views of Interest, by the Allurements of Pleasure, by the Influence of corrupt Customs, *&c.* It is therefore of great Consequence to us to be certainly inform'd of those Things, which if known must needs have a mighty Influence to ingage us to our Duty, to deter us from Vice, and to encourage and animate us to the Practice of Virtue. Of this Kind is the Doctrine of the Rewards to be conferr'd upon the Righteous, and the Punishments to be inflicted on the Wicked, in a future State. Some Apprehensions of this Matter have indeed obtain'd very generally amongst Mankind; but when we consider the dark Surmises about these Things, and the strange Notions of that future Happiness or Misery that obtain'd amongst the Heathens, mix'd with many absurd Fables; when we consider the many Difficulties rais'd on this Subject by the Pretenders to Reason; that many of the Philosophers absolutely denied a future State, that others doubted of it and regarded it as altogether uncertain, and that even most of those that asserted it advanc'd it only as a probable Conjecture, and though sometimes they seem to be persuaded of it, at other times

ſpeak of it in a Manner that ſhew'd they had ſtill ſome Suſpicions about it; when we conſider all this, which has been often ſhewn at large by thoſe that have treated this Subject, it muſt be own'd that an expreſs Revelation from God himſelf, aſſuring us of a future State, diſcovering to us the Nature of that Happineſs, and wherein it conſiſts, as alſo what the Puniſhments are that ſhall be inflicted on the Wicked, wou'd be of ſignal Uſe to Mankind. Since theſe Things, where they are firmly believ'd, muſt needs have a mighty Influence to deter and reſtrain Men from their vicious Courſes, and to ingage them to the ſteddy Practice of Righteouſneſs, in Oppoſition to the many Temptations and Diſcouragements they now meet with.

But let us ſuppoſe that Reaſon alone, without the Aſſiſtance of Revelation, might give us an abſolute Certainty of a future eternal Happineſs to be conferr'd upon all thoſe that yield a perfect Obedience to the Divine Law; yet what ſhall be done to thoſe who are conſcious to themſelves that they fall ſhort in many Inſtances? Muſt they alſo expect a future eternal Reward, as well as if they had perfectly obey'd and fulfill'd the Law? Here therefore another Queſtion ariſes of great Importance to us to have clearly decided, and that is, what Methods God will take with Creatures that have tranſgreſſed his Law; whether and upon what Terms he will pardon their Iniquities; whether he will reward even their imperfect Obedience, and if he will,

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what kind of Reward he will confer? For though we ſhou'd ſuppoſe the Light of Nature to diſcover to all Men the Precepts and Obligations of the Divine Law, ſo clearly and plainly that no Man can be ignorant of his Duty, yet if it leaves us in the Dark or under Uncertainties, what God will do and what Methods he will take with Creatures that have tranſgreſs'd his Law, which we are all conſcious to our ſelves we have done, this alone wou'd ſhew an external Revelation to be of great Uſe.

The Method this Author propoſes, as what is very evident from the Light of Nature, is that God will moſt certainly pardon Sinners upon their Repentance, that is, that he will pardon all Sinners at all Times, let their Sins have been never ſo hainous or aggravated, or frequently repeated, and not only pardon but reward them meerly and immediately upon their Repentance, without any other Proviſion made for the vindicating the Authority of his Government and Laws. And in order to judge of this, I ſhall firſt lay down ſome Principles that ought to be conſider'd on this Subject.

And firſt this Author himſelf tells us, and it is a Principle I ſhall take for granted, that "none who believe there's a God who go-"verns Mankind, but muſt believe he has "given them a Law for governing their Ac-"tions, and that this is imply'd in the very "Notion of Governor and Governed, p. 10." And the ſame Light of Nature that tells us,

that God hath given a Law to Mankind for governing their Actions, does alſo ſhew that Men are under the higheſt Obligations to govern their Actions by that Law; and that to tranſgreſs the Law of our Creator is a very great Evil, and a manifeſt Breach of all the Rules of Order; it is an Inſurrection againſt the higheſt Authority and againſt the greateſt Goodneſs, againſt the Will and Law of the ſupreme Lord, the great Benefactor and Parent of the Univerſe; that therefore this is a Crime which in its own Nature deſerves Puniſhment, and that conſequently by a Conſtitution founded in the *very Nature and Reaſon of Things*, (to uſe this Author's Expreſſions) upon Man's tranſgreſſing the Law of his Creator, there immediately reſults a Guilt on Man's part, or an Obligation or Obnoxiouſneſs to Puniſhment; that conſequently it wou'd be juſt in God to puniſh it. Indeed otherwiſe there wou'd be no Room or Exerciſe for Pardon at all; for Pardon is the Remiſſion of the Penalty that is ſuppos'd to be in Juſtice due. And if Sin did not in its own Nature deſerve Puniſhment, it wou'd be unjuſt to puniſh any Sin at any Time, whether the Sinner perſiſted in it, or repented of it, or not. This then is ſuppos'd in the preſent Queſtion, that Sin renders the Sinner juſtly obnoxious to Puniſhment.

Another Principle here ſuppos'd is, that God is a Being of infinite Purity and impartial Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, who as he has an eternal Love of Order and Rectitude, ſo is carried

carried by the Perfection of his own most excellent Nature to hate all moral Evil; and therefore it may be justly expected that he will manifest his Displeasure against it, in that way and manner which he in his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness sees most proper. It strengthens this, when it is further consider'd, that as God is to be regarded as the righteous Governor of the World, so the infinite Perfection of his Nature, whereby he always acts in a Manner most becoming his own glorious Excellencies, and agreeably to the Reason and Nature of Things, obliges him to do every thing that is proper to fulfil that Character; and though he cannot be strictly and properly a Debtor to his Creatures, yet by entring into the Relation of a moral Governor, and giving them Laws, he becomes as it were a Debtor to the Community, and the Guardian of those Laws, and therefore owes it to himself and to the Community to take the most proper Measures to vindicate those Laws from Contempt. This is not only fit and just in it self, and agreeable to the Reason of Things, but is necessary to preserve the Peace and Order and Harmony of the moral World, which very much depends on maintaining a due Reverence for his Divine Majesty, and keeping up the Authority of his Laws, and consequently a Horror of Sin in the Minds of his Creatures. 'Tis true the Light of Nature leads us to conclude, that God is merciful; but then it is also evident, and this Author own it, that the

the Acts of his Mercy are govern'd by his infinite Wiſdom; and that therefore his Mercy muſt be exercis'd only ſo far and no further than is conſiſtent with his eſſential Purity and Righteouſneſs, with his rectoral Wiſdom and Juſtice as he is the great Governor of the World, with the Regard due to his Authority and Laws, and with the publick Good, the univerſal Order and Harmony of the rational Creation; all theſe Things muſt come into Conſideration, in order to decide the preſent Queſtion. And theſe are Things ſo much above us, that it wou'd be great Preſumption to take upon us to determine poſitively concerning them. A Divine Revelation therefore muſt certainly be of vaſt Advantage in this Regard.

It is certain that in human Governments in many Caſes Repentance alone is not ſufficient to avert the Penalty; and that it is often fit and neceſſary to puniſh an Offender againſt the Laws, and to cauſe him to undergo the legal Puniſhment of his Offence, notwithſtanding he ſincerely repents of what he has done; and I believe none will pretend to advance it for a ſtated Maxim, that as often as ever Criminals repent, let their Crimes have been never ſo hainous and aggravated, often repeated and inſolently committed, yet the Magiſtrate ſhou'd be oblig'd to pardon them and reſtore them to Favour barely and immediately upon their Repentance, without any other Proviſion for vindicating the Authority of the Government and Laws.

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If it be ſaid this wou'd not be proper in human Governments, becauſe they may eaſily be deceiv'd with falſe Shews of Repentance; I anſwer, that ſuppoſing human Governors cou'd certainly diſtinguiſh a true Repentance from a falſe one, the Inconvenience of ſuch a Conſtitution to the Publick wou'd ſtill be the ſame; for it wou'd encourage Perſons to commit Crimes, in hopes of doing it with Impunity, ſince every Criminal wou'd think, that in order to eſcape Puniſhment he had nothing more to do but to repent, and that this alone wou'd fully ſatisfy the Law, and he wou'd be apt to flatter himſelf that this was at any Time in his own Power. And can any Reaſon be aſſign'd why ſuch a Conſtitution, which wou'd be fooliſh and pernicious in a human Government, wou'd be wiſe and proper in the Divine? The Goſpel indeed promiſes Forgiveneſs to the greateſt of Sinners, upon their ſincere Repentance. But then it muſt be conſider'd that we are at the ſame Time inſtructed there, that even our Repentance is not accepted without ſuch a Propitiation of an extraordinary Nature offered on our Behalf, as makes a moſt awful Declaration of God's Juſtice and Deteſtation againſt Sin, and tends to vindicate the Authority of his Government and Laws; and beſides this, the Time of our Repentance is there limited to this preſent Life or State of Trial, which conſidering the Shortneſs and Uncertainty of this Life, is a Conſideration of the higheſt Moment. But if we ſhou'd ſuppoſe

poſe that there are no Limits at all, but that whenever and as often ſoever as Sinners repent, not only in this Life, but to all Eternity, let their Crimes have been never ſo hainous and aggravated and long perſiſted in, they muſt be pardon'd and accepted, and even rais'd to the higheſt Glory and Felicity, barely and immediately upon their Repentance, without any further Proviſion made for vindicating the divine Authority, or declaring God's rectoral Juſtice, this wou'd effectually vacate the Authority of the divine Government and Laws; it wou'd inſtead of being a ſufficient Determent from Crimes be the greateſt Encouragement to commit them; it wou'd take away the Fear of God and the Dread of Puniſhment, which are the moſt effectual Reſtraints to Vice and Wickedneſs, and wou'd therefore be of the worſt Conſequence to the Peace and Order of the moral World. Reaſon therefore leads us to conclude that there muſt be ſome Bounds and Limits ſet to the Forgiveneſs of Sin, and that it muſt be diſpens'd in ſuch a way as may beſt ſecure the great ends of Government, and the Regard due to God's ſupreme Authority; but then it cannot pretend certainly to determine if left meerly to it ſelf without divine Revelation, what thoſe Bounds and Limits are, or what it is that God the moſt wiſe and righteous Governor of the World may ſee to be fit and neceſſary for the Vindication of his own Authority and Laws. This depends on Things which we thro' the Narrowneſs of our Views are not very proper Judges of.

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Supposing we have ground to hope that God will pardon Sin upon Repentance, yet still if left to our selves we might be greatly at a Loss to know, how far this Pardon shall extend, whether only to some few Sins and those of a less hainous Nature, or even to those Sins that are of great Malignity and high Aggravations, especially if frequently repeated and long persisted in; whether it may not seem fit to God to punish such Sins in an awful Manner, even notwithstanding the Repentance of the Sinner, the more effectually to deter others from presuming to offend with hope of Impunity; or if he will shew Mercy to such Sinners upon their Repentance, how far this Mercy shall extend, whether so far as to entitle them to a Reward, or only to a Mitigation of the Punishment, by remitting of the Rigor of the Penalty that is due. Indeed supposing such Sinners shou'd yield a perfect Obedience to the divine Law for the Time to come, I can't see that we cou'd have a full Assurance by the meer Light of Nature, that God wou'd absolutely free them from the whole of that Penalty they had incurr'd by their former hainous Transgressions, much less that he wou'd gloriously reward them, and give them the highest Marks of his Favour: But if we suppose (which is the true State of the Case) that their Obedience even after their Repentance is still very imperfect, and attended with many Defects, that they still fall short in many Instances of what the Law requires, and of what they themselves are sensible they might have done, if they did all that was absolutely

in their Power; what Aſſurance can we have by the meer Light of Nature, that God will not only accept that imperfect Obedience of theirs as a ſufficient Compenſation for their paſt hainous Offences, but that he will alſo reward it in a glorious Manner with that eternal Life and Happineſs which the Law promiſes to thoſe that perfectly obey? muſt thoſe that have grievouſly ſinned, and who even after their Repentance are conſcious to themſelves that they fall ſhort in many Inſtances, expect a future eternal glorious Reward, as well as if they had perfectly obey'd and fulfill'd the whole Law? 'tis evident that no Man can expect or demand ſuch a Reward by Virtue of the original Law it ſelf; no Man therefore can ſay there is any thing in the Nature or Reaſon of Things to oblige God to confer ſuch a Reward upon ſuch Perſons, or from whence it can be certainly concluded that he will do ſo. If therefore he does it at all, it muſt be by an Act of ſovereign Grace and Mercy, an Act of pure Prerogative, and how far and in what Manner and upon what terms he will exerciſe his Prerogative, lies in his own ſacred Breaſt, upon a full View of what is moſt becoming his own glorious Excellencies, moſt for the Honour of his Government, and for the Vindication of his own Authority, and for the publick Good; it muſt therefore be an unſpeakable Comfort and Satisfaction if God himſelf ſhou'd pleaſe to reveal his own Councils, and declare to us what Courſe, what Method of Procedure he will take in this Caſe, how

how far he will pardon penitent Sinners, and whether he will reward their Repentance and imperfect Obedience, and what kind of Reward he will confer.

Let us now ſee what our Author has to offer on this Subject. Having cited a Paſſage from Dr. *Clark*, "that there ariſes to Nature no "ſufficient Comfort to Sinners, but an anxi-"ous and endleſs Solicitude, about the means "of appeaſing the Deity." He produces two Paſſages in Anſwer to it, one from Mr. *Nye*, the other from Mr. *Lock*, which I ſhall take the Liberty to examine, ſince in this Caſe we are to be determin'd by Reaſon, not by the Authority of Men, however great and learned. Though if it were to be determin'd by Authority, more might be produced on the other ſide. And this is one Inſtance among many, to ſhew that what this Gentleman ſuppoſes to be clearly founded in the very Nature and Reaſon of Things is not ſo very plain and obvious, but that Men of great Penetration differ very much in their Sentiments about it, though none that acknowledge the Goſpel-Revelation can doubt whether it be reveal'd there, that God will pardon penitent Sinners, and give them eternal Life.

Mr. *Nye*, it muſt be own'd, expreſſes himſelf very ſtrongly. "I affirm (ſays he) it is "an Article of natural Religion, that For-"giveneſs does certainly follow Repentance. "If God be a merciful and benign Being, he "will accept the Payment we are able to

" make; and not insist on impossible De-
" mands with his frail bankrupt Creatures.
" No generous Man, but will forgive his E-
" nemy, much more his Child; if he disap-
" proves the Wrong he has done, is really
" griev'd for it, is desirous to make amends
" even by suffering for the Honour of the
" Person injur'd. How much more shall God
" forgive all Persons thus dispos'd and re-
" form'd; since there's no Generosity in
" Man, but what is, with his Nature infus'd
" into him by God.

This way of arguing seems plausible at first View, but if closely examin'd, has several Flaws in it. One general Remark I wou'd make upon what Mr. *Nye* advances, and it may be equally apply'd to what Mr. *Lock* offers, is this: When he tells us *Forgiveness does certainly follow Repentance*, he does not tell us how far this Forgiveness is to extend; whether it holds in all Cases and at all Times, as often soever as Sinners repent throughout Eternity; or whether there are to be certain Bounds and Limits set, beyond which Sinners are not to hope for Forgiveness, even though they shou'd repent; yet these Things must be discuss'd, in order to judge aright in this Question; to say there are no Limits at all, is contrary to Reason, as I have already shewn; but if there be Limits, then this is to leave the Sinner under Doubts and Jealousies; and the more sensible he is of his Crimes, that is, the truer penitent

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he is, the more apt he will be to give way to such Fears and Jealousies.

I don't well know what Mr. *Nye* means by saying, "if God be a merciful and benign "Being, he will accept the Payment we are "able to make, and not insist on impossible "Demands with his frail bankrupt Creatures. What are we to understand here by *impossible Demands*? Is this to be applied to the Obedience requir'd, or the Punishment to be inflicted? The former is not to the Purpose; because the Question is concerning those that have fallen short of that Obedience which they are sensible they might have render'd, and who have transgress'd the Divine Law in Instances in which they had it in their Power to have done otherwise. But the Demand we are now speaking of, which God has upon guilty Creatures that have offended him, and transgress'd his righteous Laws, is that of Punishment; and is God's insisting upon their being punish'd, insisting upon *impossible Demands*? or in other Words, is it impossible they shou'd be punish'd? This indeed wou'd put an End to the Controversy. When the Sins are once committed, it is impossible they shou'd be uncommitted; but this is not what God requires; but it is very possible for them to be punish'd for what they have committed; and this is the present Question.

Another Remark I wou'd make upon this Reasoning is, that he confounds the Sins committed against God with private Offences committed by one Man against another; and argues

gues from the Forgiveneſs of the latter to that of the former. But there is a vaſt and almoſt infinite Difference. Apply Mr. *Nye*'s Reaſoning to an earthly Magiſtrate, and the Fallacy of it immediately appears. Will it follow that becauſe there is no generous Man but will forgive his Enemy, much more his Child, if he diſapproves the Wrong he hath done, is really griev'd for it, *&c.* will it follow that therefore a Magiſtrate muſt be oblig'd in all Caſes to forgive thoſe that have violated the Laws, when they ſincerely repent of what they have done? wou'd not Mercy in many Caſes, even where there is Reaſon to think the Criminal ſincerely repents, be an Injury to the Publick? and if a Magiſtrate ſhou'd lay it down as a Rule to himſelf to pardon all that he has reaſon to think are truly griev'd for what they have done, *&c.* inſtead of commending his Generoſity, wiſe Men wou'd arraign his Wiſdom and Juſtice, and think him not very fit to govern. Now God cannot poſſibly be regarded as a private Being. As he is the greateſt and beſt of Beings, who comprehends eminently in himſelf all the Perfection and Excellency that is in the whole Creation, and infinitely more, ſo he is the ſupreme and rightful Governor of the World, the great Guardian of univerſal Order and of the Laws. This is an Idea inſeparable from the Deity; and therefore a Sin againſt God cannot be regarded as a private Offence of one Man againſt another, but as a Breach of publick Order, an Act of Diſobedience to the ſupreme univerſal Lord, and is virtually an Attempt againſt

gainſt the Peace, Order, and Harmony of the whole Creation. There is therefore no certain arguing from the Conduct that becomes us towards our Fellow Creatures that have injur'd us, to the Conduct that becomes the ſovereign Lord of the Univerſe, towards his ſinful Creatures that have tranſgreſs'd his Laws, and deſpis'd his Authority. 'Tis true our Saviour directs us to beg of God to forgive us our Treſpaſſes as we forgive them that have treſpaſs'd againſt us; the principal Deſign of which Words is to ſignify to us, that our forgiving others is a neceſſary Condition of our obtaining Forgiveneſs of God; for ſo our Saviour himſelf explains it, *Mat.* 6. 14, 15. but he is far from intending to inſinuate, that there is an exact Parallel between the Caſes, between the Offences done by one Man to another, and the Sins committed againſt God. And if God allows us notwithſtanding the infinite Difference there is between the Caſes, to make uſe of our forgiving others, as a Plea for Pardon, and as an Encouragement to hope that he will alſo forgive us, it is wonderful Condeſcenſion, and to be acknowledg'd with the higheſt Thankfulneſs. But then it is evident that we cou'd not have us'd this Plea upon ſuch ſure Grounds, and with ſuch a firm Faith and Confidence, if God himſelf had not encourag'd us to do ſo by an expreſs Revelation. Let a Criminal know a wiſe and juſt Magiſtrate to be never ſo good and merciful, benign and generous, this can never be an Aſſurance to him that his Crime, if it be a hainous one, and ſuch as the Laws condemn and puniſh, ſhall be

be pass'd by with Impunity; but rather the Uprightness and excellent Character of the Magistrate may make him apprehend that he will think it necessary for the publick Good, and for preserving the Authority of the Laws to punish him even tho' he testify his Repentance for his Crime. In like manner there is no arguing from meer Mercy in God, except it be also agreeable to his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness.

But Mr. *Nye* goes on as cited by this Author, "Not only Mercy but Wisdom will effectually dispose God to forgive the Penitent, because the Creature reform'd by Penitence, is such as it ought to be, and as God willeth it, the which being so, it can be no Wisdom in God to afflict it unnecessarily. 'Tis not Justice but Rage to punish where the Person is already mended." But as the former Argument proceeded upon a wrong Supposition, as if Sins against God were in the Nature of private Offences, so this proceeds upon a Supposition equally groundless, and that is, that the only End divine Wisdom has or can have in View in punishing a Creature, is to reform that particular Creature. His Ends in inflicting Punishments are far more extensive; they are inflicted not meerly for the Sake of that particular Creature that offends, but for the publick Good, which is to be preferr'd before that of any individual, and for vindicating his own sacred Authority, and preserving a due Reverence to his Laws and a deep Sense of the Evil of Sin in the Minds of his Creatures. And

in this Case the Good of that particular Creature must give way to those superior Considerations, drawn from the Honour of God, and the Good of the whole. To say therefore, that *it is not Justice but Rage, to punish where the Person is already mended*, is a very rash and uncautious Assertion. Apply this to human Governments, and the Falshood of it immediately appears. Let us suppose a Criminal that has been guilty of some hainous Crime to be truly penitent, will any say that if the Magistrate shou'd punish him, it wou'd not be Justice but Rage? Yea though he certainly knew him to be reform'd, yet the publick Good might make it necessary that he shou'd suffer the Penalty of the Law; and the Magistrate might be very culpably wanting to the Duty of his Office, if he pass'd it by with Impunity. The Word *Rage* still goes upon the Notion of Revenge for a private Injury. But our Author, who elsewhere talks of *punishing not for punishing sake*, ought to be able to distinguish between Rage and Justice. Can that be call'd Rage, which ingages a wise and just Magistrate to punish a Breach of the Laws, out of Regard to the Authority of the Law, to Justice, and the publick Good, and for answering the valuable Ends of Government? Is it Rage that inclines him to prefer all these to the private Advantage of the offending Person? It may be more justly said, that in many Cases to pass by the Violation of the Laws with Impunity, wou'd not be the Clemency or Wis-

dom of a juſt Governor, but a culpable Softneſs, or a partial Fondneſs for the Criminal.

Mr. *Nye* concludes thus, " When we argue thus from any of the known and certain Attributes of God, we are as ſure of the Concluſion, as if the Thing was to be diſcern'd by Senſe, ſince no ſenſible Thing is more certain than the Attributes of God. But I think his own Reaſoning here is one Inſtance among many how eaſily Men may be miſtaken, when they think they argue from the known Attributes of God, but in Reality only argue from their own miſtaken Apprehenſions of them. The Truth is, the preſent Queſtion depends upon Things we are little acquainted with, the Nature and Ends of the Divine Government, how far and in what Inſtances it is fit for God to exerciſe his Juſtice or his Mercy, and what it is proper for infinite Wiſdom to do in the Government of the moral World, Things very remote from our Apprehenſions, and in which we may be eaſily miſtaken through the Narrowneſs of our Views, and for want of comprehending the whole Scheme of Things, in their full Harmony and juſt Proportions.

Let us now examine what Mr. *Lock* ſays to the ſame Purpoſe, as quoted by the Author. He firſt ſays, " God had by the Light of Reaſon reveal'd to all Mankind, who wou'd make uſe of that Light, that he was good and merciful." This is very true; but he had alſo revealed to them by the ſame Light, that he was juſt and wiſe and holy, a Hater

Hater and Punisher of Sin; and though they might know in general, that he is good and merciful, yet how far his Mercy wou'd extend, how far and in what Instances he wou'd pardon Sin, and when and how far he wou'd think fit to punish it, they had nothing in the Light of Nature to give 'em a certain Information. Mr. *Lock* goes on, "The same "Spark of the Divine Nature and Knowledge "in Man, which making him a Man shew'd "him the Law he was under as a Man, shew'd "him also the way of attoning the merciful, "kind, compassionate Author and Father of "him and his Being, when he had transgress'd "that Law. He that made use of this Can-"dle of the Lord so far as to find what was "his Duty, cou'd not miss to find also the "way to Reconciliation and Forgiveness, "when he had fail'd of his Duty." This is very handsomely express'd, but if narrowly examin'd is not so solid. *The same Spark of the Divine Nature and Knowledge in Man, which shew'd him the Law he was under as a Man*, did also shew him the Evil of transgressing that Law, and the Punishment he justly incurr'd by it; as it made him sensible that he was under the highest Obligations to obey God, and observe the Law he had given him, so also that to sin presumptuously against the Sovereign Lord of the Universe involv'd him under so hainous a Guilt, that it wou'd be just in God to punish it with Severity; and therefore cou'd not but make him afraid, when he had violated the Law given him as the Rule

of his Duty, leſt a righteous God ſhou'd inflict the Puniſhment which he was conſcious he had deſerv'd; it made him regard God indeed as the *merciful, kind, compaſſionate Author and Father of him and his Being*, but it alſo caus'd him to regard him as the moſt wiſe, holy, and juſt Governor of the World, who perfectly hates Sin and all moral Evil, and who as he has given a Law to Mankind for the Rule of their Actions, will be their Judge to call them to an Account for their Violation of that Law, and will vindicate his own Law and Authority from Contempt, and take care ſo to order it that his Creatures may not have Hopes of tranſgreſſing it with Impunity. 'Tis true that natural Light wou'd direct a Man to do all he cou'd to attone his Judge; and might give him ſome Ground of Hope, that his Repentance wou'd be of ſome avail, at leaſt to mitigate the Rigour of the Penalty; but it cou'd not, if left to it ſelf, give a ſatisfying Aſſurance that God wou'd abſolutely pardon all Sins upon Repentance, how hainous ſoever, though frequently repeated and long perſiſted in, and reſtore the guilty Tranſgreſſors to Favour, much leſs that he wou'd confer a glorious Reward upon them; it wou'd ſtill leave room for many anxious Fears, and afford no ſufficient Comfort to appeaſe the Clamours of an awakened Conſcience, and to remove the Jealouſies of a guilty Mind. For the Acts of the Divine Mercy are not neceſſary, but govern'd in their Exerciſe by rectoral Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs, and what theſe may

may require we cannot of our ſelves pretend certainly to determine.

Mr. *Lock* goes on, "The Law is the e-"ternal immutable Standard of Right, and "a Part of that Law is, that a Man ſhou'd for-"give not only his Children, but his Enemies "upon their Repentance, asking Pardon, and "Amendment." But it is no Part of that Law that a Magiſtrate ſhou'd be oblig'd abſolutely to pardon all the Crimes even of thoſe that are truly penitent; this Law does not at all hinder the Magiſtrate from diſcharging his Office in puniſhing Crimes for the publick Good though to the particular Damage and Hurt of the Offender; yea the very Law of Nature requires this; nor is the Criminal's asking Pardon, repenting, and amending, always a ſufficient Reaſon why they ſhou'd not be puniſh'd; but it may often be proper and neceſſary, for many valuable Ends, that they ſhou'd be puniſh'd, notwithſtanding ſuch Repentance and Amendment. Mr. *Lock* adds, "And therefore he cou'd not doubt, that "the Author of this Law, and God of Pa-"tience and Conſolation, who is rich in "Mercy, wou'd forgive his frail Offſpring, "if they acknowledg'd their Faults, diſap-"prov'd the Iniquity of their Tranſgreſſions, "begg'd his Pardon, and reſolv'd in earneſt "for the future to conform their Actions to "this Rule, which they own'd to be juſt "and right; this Way of Reconciliation, "this Hope of Attonement, the Light of "Nature reveal'd to them." But it does not follow

follow that the Author of this Law (which tho' it obliges private Perſons to forgive the private Injuries of thoſe that repent, yet does not oblige Magiſtrates always to pardon Criminals even when they are truly penitent) I ſay it does not follow that the Author of this Law who is himſelf to be conſider'd as the great Governor of the World, will in all Caſes forgive the Tranſgreſſions of his Law even to the truly Penitent; he does not by ordering his Creatures to forgive private Injuries, bind himſelf as the great Ruler of the World, not to vindicate his own Authority by puniſhing the preſumptuous Tranſgreſſions of his Law; or to paſs by thoſe Tranſgreſſions with Impunity; nor does the Repentance of the Tranſgreſſors bar him from inſiſting on ſuch a Reparation as is proper for ſecuring the Majeſty of his Law, and the Authority of his Government. Tho' the Author of this Law be the Parent of Mankind, it does not follow that he muſt abſolutely forgive all their Sins upon Repentance; in human Governments where the ſame Perſon is a Parent and a Magiſtrate or Judge, he may be oblig'd to puniſh his own Children where the publick Good and the Authority of the Laws requires it, even tho' they ſhou'd repent; and not to do ſo wou'd in ſuch Caſes be a partial Fondneſs; now God is to be conſider'd not only as the Father but as the Judge and righteous Governor of the World and of Mankind, and may therefore ſee it neceſſary for the Preſervation of the publick Order and in Vindication of the Laws and of his own

own Authority to punish his offending Creatures.

Mr. *Lock* concludes, "this Way of Reconciliation, this Hope of Attonement, the "Light of Nature reveal'd to them." But 'tis certain that the Heathens generally had a Notion that something farther than meer Repentance was necessary to propitiate an offended Deity. Hence the many ways of Attonement us'd amongst them; and the human Sacrifices that obtain'd almost universally amongst all Nations. Our Author will ascribe this to Superstition, but it had its Foundation, in the natural Dread of divine Justice, and in the natural Fears and Jealousies of a guilty Mind, which is apt to turn it self every way without finding Satisfaction in any: And their Philosophers had many of them no other way to quiet those Fears, but by saying the Gods were never angry with any, destroying the Notions of divine Justice, as if God were not displeas'd with Sin, nor wou'd punish any for committing it; a Notion which our Author sometimes seems to advance, but which (as I shall shew afterwards) subverts the Foundations even of natural Religion.

After having produc'd these Passages from Mr. *Lock* and Mr. *Nye*, this Gentleman declaims after his Manner, that "nothing can "be more shocking than to suppose that God "was not at all times equally willing to par-"don repenting Sinners, and equally willing "that they shou'd have the Satisfaction of "knowing it; or to suppose that he left all

"Man-

" Mankind for ſo many Ages, and the greateſt " Part even at preſent in a moſt miſerable State " of Doubt and Uncertainty about the Pardon " of Sin, and conſequently about the Poſſibi- " lity of any Man's being ſav'd; and that the " beſt and wiſeſt Men were abſolutely ignorant " of what was of the higheſt Importance for " Men to know, p. 392, 393.

It is not denied that they might have ſome Hopes of Pardon upon Repentance, tho' mix'd with many Fears and Jealouſies; and if they fell (as this Author ſometimes owns they did, ſee p. 379.) from the *true primitive Religion*, then tho' God had never ſeen it fit to give them any abſolute Certainty in this Matter, they cou'd not juſtly have complain'd of him, for leaving them under that Uncertainty, and under thoſe Fears that were the natural Effects of their own Guilt. But all thoſe that hold that God made a Promiſe of a Saviour immediately after the Fall to the common Head and Parent of Mankind, do alſo maintain that he made gracious Diſcoveries of his Mercy to penitent Sinners from the Beginning. To keep alive a Senſe of his pardoning Mercy as well as of his Juſtice upon the Minds of Men was the Deſign of inſtituting Sacrifices, which were offer'd to God from the Beginning, and were univerſally ſpread throughout all Nations, for which there is no Reaſon ſo probably to be aſſign'd as a Tradition deriv'd from the Fountains of the human Race. If Men afterwards loſt or corrupted this Promiſe, and ſunk into a State of uni-

universal Corruption and Degeneracy, if they forsook the living and true God, and turn'd to base Idols, I don't know how this Gentleman will prove that it was inconsistent with the Divine Wisdom and Goodness to leave them in that State of Uncertainty into which they had brought themselves. And if in that Time that seem'd most fit to his infinite Wisdom, it pleas'd him again to give an express Revelation, containing the fullest Discoveries of his rich Grace and Mercy, this was infinite Goodness, and to be acknowledg'd and receiv'd with the highest Thankfulness. But to inquire why he did not do this sooner, or did it not equally to all Mankind, is to divert to another Question, *viz.* that if giving a Revelation be a remarkable Instance of the Divine Goodness, he is oblig'd to give it equally to all and at all Times, which will come properly to be consider'd, when we answer the Author's Objection against Revelation, drawn from its not being universal.

But to pass this by at present, I shall take some Notice of what he advances afterwards, p. 417, 418. because it relates to the present Subject. "Can any thing (says he) be more "evident, than that if doing Evil be the on-"ly Foundation of God's Displeasure, ceas-"ing to do Evil and doing the contrary "must take away that Displeasure?" But the Consequence is by no means evident. By *Displeasure* we are here to understand God's Will to punish; and though a Person shou'd

afterwards ceaſe to do Evil, the *Diſpleaſure* may ſtill remain for the Evil he hath already done. And I have ſhewn that there may be juſt and wiſe Reaſons for puniſhing the Evil a Man hath done, even though he repents of having done it. If *doing Evil* be the juſt *Foundation of God's Diſpleaſure*, and what he moſt diſapproves, then it may juſtly be concluded, that in making his Laws, and annexing Sanctions to thoſe Laws and executing them, he will take that Method which is moſt effectual to prevent the *doing Evil*, and to vindicate the Honour of his Laws, and deter his reaſonable Creatures from tranſgreſſing them; and whether the pardoning all Sins at all Times barely and immediately upon Repentance, without any other Proviſion for declaring his Juſtice, and vindicating the Authority of his Laws and Government, wou'd be a proper Method to anſwer this End, and reſtrain the doing Evil, hath been already conſider'd.

But he adds, "As long as Men continue in "their Sins, they muſt continue the proper "Objects of God's Reſentment, but when "they forſaking their Sins act a Part ſuitable "to their rational Nature, they of Courſe be-"come the proper Objects of his Approbation. I deny that this neceſſarily follows. For I ask, in ſuch a Caſe wou'd it be juſt in God to puniſh Perſons for their paſt Sins or not? If not, I ask did thoſe Sins in their own Nature deſerve Puniſhment or not? If not, God cou'd not juſtly puniſh thoſe Sins, even though the Sinners had perſiſted in them, which is contrary

to

to the present Supposition. If they did in their own Nature deserve Punishment, and if the Law was just that threaten'd Punishment to those Sins, then it is not unjust to inflict that Punishment which the Law threaten'd, and which those Sins deserv'd; and consequently it does not follow, that upon Men's forsaking those Sins, they immediately and of Course so far become the Objects of the Divine Approbation, as to be freed from the Punishment they had incurr'd by their past Crimes. The Author here seems to argue upon this Supposition, that it is not just to punish Persons for any Crimes, any longer than they continue to commit those Crimes; that when once they have ceas'd to do so, all the Obligation to Punishment, and the Guilt they had contracted by those Crimes, ceases of Course, and it is unjust to inflict the Punishment those Crimes had deserv'd. But this is to subvert all Government at once, and the Authority of the Laws. Properly speaking all Punishment is for Crimes already committed, in consequence of which the Law has a Demand upon them, and their forsaking their Crimes afterwards does not vacate that Debt of Punishment which they had contracted. Indeed if this Argument be good for any thing it wou'd prove, that God is absolutely oblig'd even in Justice to pardon Sinners upon their Repentance, and that he cannot in Justice refuse to do so. But this seems to me to imply a Contradiction. For the very Notion of Pardon signifies the Remission of that Penalty that is justly due; it supposes that the

Persons pardon'd had deserv'd or incurr'd the Penalty, but that the Penalty is graciously remitted. And if it supposes they had deserv'd the Penalty, or that their Crimes render'd them obnoxious to Punishment, it also supposes that in strict Justice that Punishment might be inflicted; and otherwise there wou'd be no such Thing as Forgiveness, or the Exercise of Mercy in forgiving. It must therefore be own'd, that God is not oblig'd in Justice, antecedently to his own Promise, to pardon Sinners even upon their Repentance; and that if he refus'd to pardon them, or remit the Penalty they had incurr'd, he wou'd not do an unjust Thing. To say the contrary, wou'd be to put the Pardon of penitent Sinners not upon God's Goodness and Mercy, but upon his Justice. At this rate we shou'd not say as Mr. *Nye* does in the Passage above produc'd by this Author, and as all do that talk on this Subject, that *if God be a merciful and benign Being*, but if he be a *just Being*, he will forgive the Transgressions of his offending Creatures upon their Repentance; so that we need not implore the Pardon of Sins as a Favour, but may demand it as a Right which he cannot in Justice withold from us; which is to say, either that there is no Law of God at all, that is, that God is not the Governor of the World, or that there is no Evil, no Crime in transgressing that Law, or that though there be a Crime in transgressing that Law, and though it deserves Punishment, and the Law denounces Punishment against it, yet God has no Right to inflict that Punishment which the

Crime

Crime deserves, and which the Law justly denounces against that Crime; that is, that it is unjust in God to do that which by the Supposition is allow'd to be just. But this is contrary to Reason, and the common Sense of all Mankind, who have always thought it a proper Language for Penitents before God to acknowledge, that they have by their Sins deserv'd Punishment, and that it wou'd be just in him to punish them accordingly. But if God is not oblig'd in Justice, antecedently to his own Promise, to pardon Sinners barely and immediately upon their Repentance; then it is plain that if he does pardon them at all, it must be by an Act of free undeserved Mercy, concerning the Measures and Extent of which, and in what Methods and upon what Terms it shall be exercis'd, we are not of ourselves very fit to determine.

Before I leave this Subject, I shall produce some Passages from this Author himself, by which it will appear that even on his own Principles we cannot, if left to our selves, attain to a Certainty how far and upon what Terms God will pardon Sinners. He tells us, p. 41. that "though Justice and Mercy are eternally "inherent in the Divine Nature, yet these "oblige not God either to punish or pardon "any farther than his infinite Wisdom sees fit, "and such punishing and pardoning are tran-"sient Acts, the Effects of his Will, not Pro-"perties belonging to his Nature." Now if his Mercy obliges him not to pardon Sinners any farther than his infinite Wisdom sees fit, then

then we can be no further ſure that he will pardon Sinners, than we are ſure that it ſeems proper to his Wiſdom to do ſo. And can we pretend of our ſelves to paſs a certain Judgment on what depends on God's moſt wiſe Counſels, and on the Determinations of his infinite Wiſdom? in many Caſes private Perſons are very improper Judges of what it is proper for wiſe Governors to do in human Governments, and of what the Reaſon of State and the publick Good requires; and much more unfit are we thro' the Narrowneſs of our Views to pretend to paſs a certain Judgment on the Meaſures of infinite Wiſdom, and what God may ſee fit and proper in the Government of the World. If pardoning be an Effect of his Will, an expreſs Revelation of his Will in this Caſe to aſſure us how far and upon what Terms he will pardon muſt be own'd to be a great Advantage.

Again he ſaith, p. 41. "when the Magi-
"ſtrate puniſhes a Criminal 'tis an Act of Ju-
"ſtice to the Publick, and when he pardons
"him 'tis an Act of Mercy to the Criminal,
"tho' an Act of Injuſtice to the Publick."
How ſhou'd we know therefore if left meerly to the Light of Nature but that it might in many Caſes be unfit for the great Ruler of the World to pardon Sins even tho' repented of? can we pretend to take upon us to judge poſitively in Things of ſo high a Nature, as what the publick Good of the Univerſe may require? may not that which we think to be agreeable to our own particular Good, appear to infinite Wiſdom that takes in a full View of the whole

whole to be contrary to the general Good? in which Case that which we regard as an Act of Mercy to the particular Person that offends, may be an Act of Injustice to the Publick. How do we know if left meerly to what our own Reason dictates, but that however hard it may seem to us, partial as we are in our own Cause, yet the general Good may require in many Cases at least, that Sins shou'd be awfully punish'd, notwithstanding the Repentance of the Sinner, as it unquestionably often is in human Governments?

Again he obleryes, p. 115, that "the natu-"ral Law not only commands that Evil Doers "shou'd be punish'd, but that Men according "to the different Circumstances they are un-"der, shou'd take the most proper Methods "for doing it, and vary as Exigencies require." It is not therefore according to our Author a meer arbitrary Thing, whether Evil Doers shou'd be punish'd. It is what the natural Law commands or requires. From whence I think it follows that it is proper that God as the righteous Governor of the World shou'd punish Evil Doers; and it must be left to his infinite Wisdom and Justice to appoint the Measure and Manner of this Punishment, how far it is to extend, when and in what Cases to be mitigated or remitted; and these are Things we cannot of our selves pretend certainly to determine any farther than he is pleas'd to reveal his Will to this Purpose; and if he does so, it will be of great Use to free us from the Doubts and Uncertainties we must otherwise be under.

Again,

Again, the Author takes some Pains to shew that even all private Injuries done by one Man to another are not to be forgiven, he says, "the "Doctrine of forgiving Injuries, except in-"terpreted consistently with what the Light "of Nature dictates to be our Duty, in pre-"serving our Reputation, Liberty, and Pro-"perty, and in doing all we can to hinder all "Injury and Injustice from others as well as "our selves, would be a Doctrine attended "with fatal Consequences, so that the Expe-"diency or even Lawfulness of forgiving In-"juries depends on such Circumstances as hu-"man Discretion is to judge of, p. 340." Here he plainly supposes that in some Circumstances it is not only inexpedient but unlawful to forgive private Injuries; that human Discretion is to judge when and in what Cases and how far it is proper to forgive Injuries; and that in this we are to have a Regard to others as well as our selves, and to what is for the publick Good. And must not God then be allow'd to be the only proper Judge how far and in what Circumstances to forgive the Offences committed against him? and if so, how can we pretend certainly to know, how far and in what Cases and upon what Terms he will do it, except he is pleas'd to reveal his Will in this Matter? the Author adds, p. 341. that "the Precept of "forgiving Injuries tho' it forbids me to punish "for Punishment Sake, does not bar me of a "legal Remedy; and that all good Govern-"ments oblige People for the Sake of the "common Good, to prosecute those who have

"in-

" injur'd them by robbing, ſtealing, or any " other ways cheating or defrauding them." Now I urge, that ſince he ſuppoſes that all good Governments oblige Perſons in many Caſes to proſecute thoſe who have injur'd them, and that, as is often the Caſe, notwithſtanding their Repentance, then he muſt grant that in many Caſes the publick Good requires that Injuries ſhou'd be puniſh'd notwithſtanding the Repentance of the Criminal; why may it not then be ſuppos'd that in many Caſes the publick Good of the Univerſe, for the more effectual deterring Perſons from Sin, and maintaining the Authority of God and the Majeſty of his Government and Laws, and preſerving a due Reverence of him in the Minds of his Creatures, requires that Sinners, at leaſt thoſe guilty of Sins of a more hainous kind, and long and obſtinately perſiſted in, ſhou'd be ſeverely puniſh'd, notwithſtanding the Repentance of the Sinner? And as it wou'd not be a Virtue but a Fault in a Magiſtrate to give way to the Movements of Pity, in a Caſe where the great Ends of Government and the publick Good require him to puniſh, ſo it wou'd be far from being a Perfection in the Deity, if his Compaſſion to any Creature ſway'd him to a Procedure, that in the whole is not for the Good, the Order, and Welfare of the moral World. So that after all, we are no further ſure by the Light of Nature, of God's forgiving any particular Offences upon Repentance, than we are ſure that it is for the publick Good, and for the Order and Welfare of the whole, that

thoſe Offences thus circumſtanc'd ſhou'd be forgiven.

Thus, *e. g.* let us ſuppoſe a Man to have lived for many Years in a Courſe of groſs preſumptuous Sins, contrary to the Dictates of his own Conſcience; let us ſuppoſe alſo that he is at length truly penitent, brought to a deep Senſe and Horror of his Crimes, and a hearty Sorrow for them; but he is full of anxious Thoughts whether God will forgive him. What Certainty can be given him of Pardon from the meer Light of Nature? Tell him that God is merciful, and will forgive his Sins upon Repentance. He may juſtly reply, How know I but a juſt and holy God, the wiſe and righteous Governor of the World may ſee it neceſſary, notwithſtanding my Repentance, to make me an Example of his juſt Vengeance, for vindicating the Authority of his Laws, that others may ſee and fear, and not dare to do ſo wickedly? Or though he may think proper to forgive ſome lighter Offences, yet what Aſſurance have I that he will forgive ſuch hainous preſumptuous Sins, ſo long perſiſted in againſt the Dictates of Conſcience (which he has plac'd as a Monitor and a Judge within me) as I have been guilty of? Or if he will in ſome Meaſure remit the Rigor of the Penalty upon my Repentance, yet how do I know how far he will remit it, and what Puniſhment (though leſs than the Demerit of my Crimes) he will ſtill think fit to lay upon me? What Aſſurance can I have that he will after all receive me to Favour, and make me happy in the Enjoyment of himſelf? Here my Soul is toſs'd about

about with endless Uncertainties; I find some Hope when I consider the Divine Mercy, but I am cast down again when I consider the Justice and Righteousness of God as the great Ruler of the World, the Greatness of his Majesty, the Hainousness and Aggravations of my Crimes, and the Authority of his Laws. I know he is merciful, but his Mercy is always exercis'd in a Consistency with his Justice and Wisdom, and the great Ends of his Government, and how know I then but his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness may see it fit to punish such Sinners as I am, and make them Monuments and Examples to all the World, to shew forth the Authority of his Laws, and preserve in the Minds of his Creatures a just Dread of offending him? May not many Cases happen (and how know I but mine is such a Case?) in which it is not fit that Repentance it self shou'd avert the Punishment, because the publick Good requires, that those who thus sin shou'd be exemplarily punish'd?

I know not what the Author cou'd say to satisfy such a Person, and to remove his Fears, except it were to tell him, that he needs not be afraid, he has done God no Injury, there is no such thing properly as sinning against God at all; which is the Scheme he advances in his fourth Chapter. But as these Things are not only false in themselves, as I shall afterwards shew, but contrary to Men's natural Notions, I believe they cou'd give but small Satisfaction to a guilty awaken'd Conscience.

But if God hath given an expreſs Revelation, in which he hath plainly declar'd the Methods in which he will be reconcil'd to his offending Creatures; if it appears that he hath himſelf made a moſt wiſe Proviſion for manifeſting his Mercy to penitent Sinners, in ſuch a way as ſecures the Honour of his Juſtice, and the Authority of his Laws; if he hath accordingly in that Revelation expreſly ingag'd himſelf by Promiſe to pardon even the greateſt of Sinners, when they return to him by a ſincere Repentance, and to crown even their imperfect if ſincere Obedience with a glorious eternal Reward; this muſt needs be an unſpeakable Satisfaction to Creatures conſcious to themſelves of many Sins and Defects, and every way ſufficient to remove the Fears and Jealouſies of the truly penitent. And it muſt be a further Satisfaction to them to be aſſur'd, that if they apply themſelves with Sincerity to their Duty, God will grant them thoſe Divine Influences and Aids, which may be of infinite Uſe to aſſiſt and ſupport them amidſt the manifold Temptations to which they are expos'd. To be aſſur'd of all theſe Things by an expreſs Declaration of the Divine Will, cannot but highly tend to our Comfort, and to our Encouragement in the Ways of Virtue.

The Sum of what has been ſaid with reſpect to the Clearneſs of the Law of Nature is this. It has been ſhewn, that whatever human Reaſon may be ſuppos'd abſolutely ſpeaking to be capable of, if carried to the utmoſt poſſible Improvement, yet taking Mankind as they are,

if

if left to themſelves they won'd be greatly at a Loſs in many Things which it is of great Importance to us to know; that even with reſpect to thoſe Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, that ſeem capable of the cleareſt Proof to right Reaſon, yet Men have been under great Darkneſs and Uncertainty, where they have been left meerly to their own unaſſiſted Reaſon; nor can it be ordinarily expected that the Bulk of Mankind (whatever we ſuppoſe their natural Capacities to be) ſhou'd come to a diſtinct, a clear and certain Knowledge of them, if left to collect them each Man for himſelf, by the meer Force of his own Reaſon; that therefore an external Revelation from God, laying theſe Principles and Duties clearly before them, wou'd be of great Uſe, to give them a more clear and certain and eaſy Knowledge of them than otherwiſe they wou'd have. That beſides thoſe Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature, which ſeem to be abſolutely and in themſelves capable of clear Proof to right Reaſon, there are other Things concerning which the Reaſon of Man, if left to it ſelf, cou'd not pretend to form a clear and certain Judgment, as being Things that depend in a great meaſure on the Divine Counſels, and the free Determinations of infinite Wiſdom; ſuch are the Methods God will take with his offending Creatures that have tranſgreſs'd his Law; whether and how far and upon what Terms he will pardon their Iniquities; whether he will reward even their imperfect Obedience, and what kind of Reward he will confer.

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Theſe Things are of great Importance to us to know, and yet the Light of Nature alone cannot give us a certain Information about them. It were therefore greatly to be wiſh'd that God wou'd give us an expreſs Revelation of his Will on theſe Heads; and if he has done ſo, we ought to accept it with great Thankfulneſs, and with a deep Senſe of our Obligations to the divine Goodneſs.

And now I think the two main Pillars of the Author's Scheme, the one concerning the abſolute Perfection of the original Law of Nature, which he ſuppoſes to be incapable of any Additions; the other concerning the Clearneſs of it to all Mankind which he ſuppoſes to be ſo well known to all Men by the Light of Nature, or the meer Force of their own Reaſon, that it cou'd not poſſibly be made clearer by any external Revelation, have been ſhewn to be very weak and without any ſolid Foundation; and conſequently the Arguments drawn from thence to ſhew that no external Revelation can either inſtruct us in any thing that did not belong to that original Law, or can make this Law clearer to us than it is to all Men without it, and is therefore perfectly needleſs and uſeleſs, fall to the Ground. This might ſuffice to ſhew the Weakneſs and Inſufficiency of the Author's Scheme; but that we may have a better Notion of his Views, and the true Deſign and Tendency of that glorious Scheme he wou'd introduce, I ſhall now proceed to conſider the Account he himſelf gives of the main Principles of that Law of Nature which he ſup-

ſuppoſes to be ſo clear and at the ſame time of ſuch great Advantage to Mankind.

CHAP. VII.

That the Author's Scheme of Natural Religion is very defective, and that he gives a wrong Account of ſome of the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature.

THE Author of Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, on all Occaſions profeſſes his high Eſteem of the Law of Nature; this is the Rule by which it is to be ſuppos'd he is for governing his own Actions, and which he recommends to others as the beſt Rule for governing theirs. It is therefore to be ſuppos'd, that he both has the Intereſts of this Law nearly at heart, and that he himſelf has a thorough Knowledge of it. He repreſents it to be that Religion which it is the Will of God all Men ſhou'd *know*, *believe*, *profeſs*, and *practice*; he ought therefore to be ſo juſt and kind as to let the World know what it is which is of ſo great Importance to them to believe, profeſs, and practice. He frequently indeed aſſerts it to be ſo clear to all Mankind that they need no

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Information about it; but he does wrong to measure all Men's Understandings by his own; that may not perhaps be clear to others which seems perfectly clear to him; and it is certain from the general Strain of his Book that he supposes almost all Mankind to have fallen from the original uncorrupted Religion of Nature, which therefore in his great Charity he endeavours to restore, and represent in its primitive Purity and Simplicity, stripp'd of those corrupt Additions and impure Mixtures which the Folly and Superstition of Men have introduc'd.

But if it shou'd appear that after all his Boasts of the Clearness of the Law of Nature, he himself gives a wrong Account of some of the main Duties of that Law; and that notwithstanding his high Pretences of a Regard and Veneration for it, he advances Principles which by evident Consequence subvert that Law, I believe it will be own'd that in such a Case he is far from deserving the Praises he expects from others, and which he very liberally bestows upon himself.

And yet I am perswaded upon the most impartial Consideration of his Book that this is really the Case, and am apt to think that the wrong Notions he entertains of the Law of Nature form some of his chief Prejudices against the Christian Revelation.

The main Principle he lays down as the Foundation of his whole Scheme of natural Religion is this, that " as it is evident from " the Light of Nature that there is a God, or

" in

" in other Words, a Being absolutely perfect " and infinitely happy in himself, so it is equal- " ly demonstrable that the Creatures can nei- " ther add to or take from the Happiness of that " Being; and that he cou'd have no Motive in " framing his Creatures, or in giving Laws to " such of them as are capable of knowing his " Will, but their own Good, p. 14." Or as he expresses it, p. 20, 21. that " it is impossi- " ble for God in governing the World to have " any other thing in view than the Good of " the Govern'd. Nor can he require any " thing of us but what makes for our Happi- " ness, nor forbid any thing but what tends to " our Hurt, p. 14, 15." For clearing the De- sign of this Passage, and others to the same Purpose, it must be observ'd, that he supposes that " there are certain Things which *natu-* " *rally* and *necessarily* conduce to the Good " or Hurt of Mankind, and that these are the " only Things God can require or forbid, p. 357. And that consequently God cannot re- quire any thing of Men, except that particular thing *necessarily* tends in the Nature of Things to their Good, nor can forbid any thing, ex- cept that particular thing tends *naturally* and *necessarily* to their Hurt. For this is his plain Meaning, and on this Foundation it is that he argues against positive Precepts. Accordingly he expresly declares, that " God can require " nothing of Men, but what they for their " own Interest, though there were no positive " Divine Commands, were oblig'd to do, p. 359.

It is in pursuance of this Scheme of Principles, that he seems frequently to resolve all Man's Obedience purely into a Regard to his own Interest; that this is the Measure of his Duty; and that his own Advantage is to be the ultimate End he is to have in view. To this Purpose he observes, that "as the Desire of "Happiness is the only innate Principle in "Mankind, p. 20, 363. so the Spring of all "the Creature's Actions is their own Good, "and it is for this Reason only that they "are to love God himself, p. 16. That "no "Man can be oblig'd to do any thing that does "not some way or other contribute to his Hap-"piness (yea except he knows that that particular Thing has a *natural* Tendency to procure his Happiness, for this seems to be his Meaning, since he immediately adds,) that "consequently according to the Sense Men "have of their own Happiness, and of the "Means which will *naturally* procure it, they "will assuredly attain the Knowledge of their "respective Duties, p. 23." Accordingly he declares, and it is the Subject and Title of his ninth Chapter, that "human Happiness is the "ultimate End and Design of all traditional "as well as original Revelation." Though this is very odd, when he believes and it is the Design of his Book to shew, that there is really no such Thing as a true traditional Divine Revelation, distinct from what he calls the original and natural One, and that all professed traditional Revelation is contrary to human Happiness, and has the worst Influence upon it.

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It is upon this Supposition of our Duty being to be measur'd by our Interest, that he founds his great Rule concerning the Morality of Actions, which he places wholly in their Tendency to our own Benefit in the Circumstances we are in. He saith, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them either "good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good, and those "that have a contrary Tendency are always "bad; and 'tis the Circumstances Men are "under by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions." This is the Rule which he so highly extols, as holding in all Cases without Exception, p. 345. 349. 350. Accordingly he maintains that it is this must direct us when we are to speak Truth. The Expediency of Truth or Falshood must be judg'd of wholly by its Tendency to our Benefit in the Circumstances we are in, p. 347.

But tho' he seems frequently to resolve the whole of our Duty into a Regard to our own private Interest, yet at other Times he places the whole of Religion in doing good to others. He tells us, that "Religion as well as Government "was *wholly* ordain'd for Men's mutual Defence, p. 20." And he defines "Religion to "consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to "do all the Good we can, and thereby render "our selves acceptable to God in answering the "End of our Creation, p. 21." From God's being Self-sufficient, and having no Motive to create things, but only that he might communicate to them his Goodness and Happiness, he in-

fers, that "if ſo, then they who do all the "Good they can to themſelves and their Fel-"low-Creatures, anſwer the End of their Cre-"ation, p. 355." This he repeats, p. 188. and often elſewhere. He aſſerts, that "as "Man is by Nature qualified to anſwer all the "Purpoſes of a ſocial Life, and to act a Part "agreeable to Reaſon, ſo in doing this he gives "Glory to his Maker by fulfilling the End of "his Creation, p. 72." He frequently repreſents Religion as conſiſting wholly in imitating God; and this Imitation of him he makes to conſiſt wholly in doing good to Mankind; and therefore that "all rational Creatures, who "to their utmoſt imitate their great Creator "and Benefactor, in communicating Happi-"neſs to each other, do all that God requires "of them, p. 279." And that "the only "way we have to ſhew our real Gratitude to "our great Creator and Benefactor, is to be as "uſeful as we can to his Creatures, whom we "ought to love as our ſelves, p. 72.

Having repreſented this Author's Scheme, as far as it relates to the main Principles of the Law of Nature, let us now, that we may have a full View of his Deſign, ſee what he offers concerning the Sanctions of that Law. From his great Principle that God is infinitely happy in himſelf, and therefore can have no other End in view but the Good of his Creatures, he infers, and it is the Subject of his fourth Chapter, that "not only the Matter of all "God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd to "them are for the Good of Mankind, even

"of

" of those who suffer for the Breach of them."

In Pursuance of this Design, he affirms, " that as it was for the Sake of Man that he " gave him Laws, so he executes them for the " same Reason, that is, purely for the Good of Mankind; " since upon his own Account " he can't in the least be affected, whether his " Laws be or be not observ'd, p. 38. and " cannot strictly speaking be made angry, pro- " vok'd or griev'd by the Conduct of us wret- " ched Mortals, nor can gain any Comfort or " Satisfaction from the Thoughts and Acti- " ons of his Creatures, p. 39. that is, from " their observing his Laws, as he expresses it, p. 38. Accordingly it seems to me to be his Design to insinuate that there is no such Thing properly as sinning against God at all; nor are Sins ever to be regarded as Offences committed against God, but only as Injuries done by one Creature to another; for he tells us, " no " Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt " to his Maker, nor imagines he can do God " an Injury; and as he can never be injur'd, " so he can never want Reparation, p. 38. and " that consequently in punishing no more than " rewarding does God act a Party, much less " an injur'd Party, who wants Satisfaction or " Reparation of Honour, *ibid.* and therefore he will not allow that " God in punishing those " who violate his Law, acts from a Regard to " his own Honour, and the Dignity of his " Laws and Government, or that he ever pu- " nishes them as for an Injury done to himself, " distinct from the Harm that accrues by the

" Breach

" Breach of them to his Creatures, p. 37, 38. He affirms, that " in doing Acts of Juſtice, " God acts purely for the Good of his Crea- " tures; and the Effects of his Juſtice muſt " not only be for the Good of others, but e- " ven of the Perſons puniſh'd, and ſince God " can never hate any thing he hath made, " whatever Puniſhment he inflicts muſt be a " Mark of his Love, (*viz.* to that particular Perſon that is puniſh'd, p. 41, 22.) and on theſe Principles he argues againſt the Eternity of Hell Torments, *ibid.* Finally he ſeems to deny any Rewards or Puniſhments at all, but what naturally and neceſſarily flow from the Nature of the Actions themſelves which Men do, p. 25, 26. The Paſſages I ſhall produce afterwards.

Thus I have endeavour'd in one View to lay before the Reader the Author's Scheme of Principles relating to natural Religion, that we may the better ſee what kind of Religion it is that he wou'd introduce inſtead of the Chriſtian Revelation.

It muſt be own'd that he ſpeaks in exalted Terms of God, of his infinite Perfection and Self-ſufficiency; the Principle upon which he builds his whole Scheme, ſeems to be a glorious one, and makes a very fair Appearance, *viz.* That God is infinitely happy in himſelf, and that the Creatures can neither add to nor take from his Happineſs. But then we are to be very careful what Conſequences we draw from this Principle. The *Epicureans* who this Author tells us, p. 56. *had exalted Notions of*

their

their Gods from this very Principle, that the divine Nature is perfectly happy in it self, not to be benefited by our Services, nor hurt by our Misdeeds; drew Consequences that tended to the utter Destruction of all Religion and Virtue; *viz.* that therefore God does not concern himself with Man or his Affairs, either to reward the virtuous or to punish the wicked.

To represent God as all Goodness, having nothing in view but the Happiness of his Creatures seems a plausible Scheme; but if a Man shou'd represent God as so intirely designing the Good of his Creatures, yea and of every particular Creature, that he cannot punish any of them for their Misdeeds, so that they need not be afraid of any Evil from him; this under Pretence of magnifying the divine Goodness, wou'd be to banish the Fear of God out of the World, to betray the Cause of Virtue, and to give a full Encouragement to all Vice and Wickedness, by taking away those Terrors of divine Justice which are the most effectual Restraints to Evil Doers.

For any Man to say that God does nothing for his own Sake, or for his own Good, that he requires nothing of Man, no Part of Religion for his own Sake but for our's, looks plausible, and seems to argue exalted Thoughts of the supreme Being and of his disinterested Goodness; but if under this Pretence he shou'd insinuate that God in giving Laws or executing them, does not act at all from a Regard to his own Dignity and Authority, and to what is becoming his own infinite Majesty; that no Part

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of Religion terminates directly and immediately on God; that he requires of his Creatures no Duties or Worſhip of which he is the proper and immediate Object as diſtinct from their doing good to one another; this Man wou'd under Pretence of high Thoughts of God, and of ſubverting Superſtition, baniſh Religion out of the World, and ſubvert a fundamental Part of the Law of Nature, which in the firſt place preſcribes the Duties we more immediately owe to the Author of our Beings.

To ſay no Man can injure or hurt God is very true, but if under this Pretence any Man ſhou'd endeavour to leſſen the Malignity of Sin, and inſinuate that all the Evil of it conſiſts in the Harm it does to our ſelves or to our Fellow Creatures, and that it ſhall not be regarded or puniſh'd at all as an Offence againſt the Majeſty and Authority of the great Ruler of the World. This wou'd in my Opinion have a very ill Influence, as it wou'd tend to diminiſh the Horror of Sin, and to make People eaſy in their Crimes.

To ſpeak of the inward Satisfaction that attends Virtue, and the Horrors and Agonies that accompany and follow a vicious Courſe in the very Nature of the Thing, ſeems to argue juſt Thoughts of the Beauty and Excellency of the one, and of the Odiouſneſs and Deformity of the other, but if a Man ſhou'd under this Pretence deny any Rewards or Puniſhments but what neceſſarily flow from the very Nature of Virtue and Vice, he wou'd deprive the one of ſome of its ſtrongeſt Supports, and wou'd take away thoſe Reſtraints

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that are most effectual to deter Men from the other.

I own I look upon the Principles of this Author in this View, and as having this Tendency. If I mistake him it is not willingly, but after the most mature and impartial Consideration I am capable of. And therefore I can't help thinking, that after all his glorious Pretences to Virtue and Morality, he really subverts it, and that his Scheme has not a much more friendly Aspect on natural Religion taken in its just Extent, than it has on reveal'd.

But this will more plainly appear from a more particular Examination of his Scheme, to which I shall now proceed.

I shall begin with considering his great Principle, that God is infinitely happy in himself, and that the Creatures can neither add to nor take from his Happiness. A Principle undoubtedly true. For God's Happiness consists in the infinite and absolute Perfection of his Nature, and the Complacency necessarily and eternally arising from it. And as his own Perfection, and the Complacency or Delight arising from it, is always alike infinite, that is, incapable of Addition or Diminution, so it must be granted, that it can never be his End in giving Being to his Creatures or in giving them Laws, to add to his own essential Happiness, that is, to add to his own Perfection, or to the Complacency arising from it; or in other Words, to make himself more perfect and happy and glorious than he always necessarily is; for this is impossible. But though it can't be said, that

in making Creatures or giving them Laws he design'd to add to his own Happiness or essential Perfection, yet we must say that in making the World, and in all his Dealings with his Creatures, he design'd (and it is impossible for him to do otherwise) to act agreeably to his own infinite Perfection, which is an eternal and indispensable Law to him, and that his acting thus yields him Complacency. We can't possibly conceive of it otherwise. And it is thus the Author himself represents it, Chap. 3. the Title of which runs thus, that "the Perfection and Happiness of all rational Beings, "Supreme as well as Subordinate, consists in "living up to the Dictates of their Nature." And afterwards he explains himself thus, that "that which renders God so infinitely happy "in himself, is the exact Agreement of all his "Actions with the all-comprehending Reason "of his own Mind, p. 23." And again, that "the Perfection, and consequently the Happiness of God consists in the Purity and "Rectitude of his Nature, *ib.*

Though therefore the communicative Goodness of God's own most perfect Nature, was the immediate Motive and Principle in his creating the World, and the various Orders of Beings in it, yet this Goodness must be always consider'd as under the Direction of infinite Wisdom and Rectitude; and this Wisdom and Rectitude of the Divine Nature carries him always to do that which is most just and right, and all Things consider'd fittest to be done, and most agreeable to the Order of Things.

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When therefore we are inquiring what God can or cannot do, or what is the Rule and Measure of his Dealings with his Creatures, we are not to consider meer Goodness or Beneficence alone, but Goodness as under the Direction of infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. Indeed meer Goodness or Bounty alone is far from constituting a perfect Character; for who wou'd have a great Esteem for a blind necessary Goodness acting without Discernment to the utmost of its Capacity? And therefore this is far from being an adequate Notion of the Deity. And it is evident in fact, that it is not meer infinite Goodness or Bounty, acting necessarily to the utmost of its Capacity, that is exercis'd either in creating or in governing the World, and the several Orders of Beings in it (for then all Creatures must have been made necessarily and unavoidably happy, and that equally at all Times to the utmost possible Degree, which is contrary to plain Fact) but Goodness as directed in all its Effects by infinite Wisdom. It must be further consider'd, that the Goodness of the Supreme Being is to be regarded as having a Respect to the Good of the Whole; and the Good of the Whole must take in whatever tends to the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of the universal System, and therefore he can design the Good and Happiness of particular Beings, no further than is consistent with and subservient to the general Good and Order of the whole moral World.

And now let us consider the Use our Author makes of this great Principle, that God is infinitely happy in himself; it is this, that *it*

is impoſſible for him, either in *giving Laws* or in *executing thoſe Laws, to have any other thing in view than the Good of the Govern'd,* and by this he ſeems to underſtand not meerly the general Good of his Creatures, but the Good of each particular Creature; he repreſents this as preciſely the ſingle Point the Supreme Being has or can poſſibly have in view. Upon this Foundation his whole Scheme proceeds; that therefore God can require nothing of any Creature, but what in the Nature of Things tends to that Creature's own particular Benefit, and can inflict no Puniſhment but what is for the Benefit even of that particular Perſon that is puniſh'd. And he tells us, p. 408. that "God "will either here or hereafter beſtow on the "rational Creation all the Happineſs their Na- "ture is capable of, ſince that was the End "why God gave it them." Where, as far as I can underſtand him, he ſeems to intimate, that God muſt make all rational Creatures, not only all Orders of Beings, but every Individual in each Order or Species of Beings, as happy as they are capable of either in this World or in the next; and that this was the End why God gave them their Nature. But I ask, muſt not the Conſideration of their moral Character and Conduct be taken in, (ſince it is of reaſonable Creatures, moral Agents that we are ſpeaking) in order to ſhew whether and how far it is conſiſtent with the Divine Wiſdom and Purity to beſtow Happineſs upon them? When this Gentleman here ſuppoſes, that God gave them Natures capable of Happineſs, and that his End

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in giving them those Natures was that they might be happy, must not this be understood thus, that he gave them reasonable moral Powers and Faculties, in the due Use and Improvement of which they shou'd obtain Happiness, and not otherwise? Or is the Meaning of it this, that God will make them all happy whether they do this or not, in whatsoever manner they behave, and however they act? But wou'd not this be to confound the Reasons and Differences of Things, to suppose that God will raise those that have made the worst Use of their Reason and moral Agency, to the same Happiness with those that have made the best? And upon this Scheme of Things, I can see no Reason for the Limitation this Author here puts, that God will make them all happy *either here or hereafter*; for if meer infinite Goodness were to be consider'd as acting to the utmost of its Capacity, and God's only End in giving them their Natures was to make them happy at any rate and by any means, it ought to be said, that *both here and hereafter* God will bestow on all the rational Creation all the Happiness their Natures are capable of; and that they must all be immediately rais'd to the highest possible Felicity, and be at all Times perfectly happy; which it is evident from plain Fact and Experience an infinitely wise and good God has not thought fit to do.

But if this Gentleman will explain himself thus, that when he saith, it was God's Design in making reasonable Creatures, and giving them Laws, to bestow upon them the Happi-

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neſs they are capable of, he only intends to ſignify, that God deſigns to make them happy in ſuch a way and upon ſuch terms as becomes moral Agents, and as is conſiſtent with the Freedom of their Natures, and with the Nature and Order of moral Government, (and accordingly he talks of God's dealing with Men hereafter *according to the Uſe they have made of their moral Agency here*) then God's Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs muſt come in to be conſider'd in his Dealings with his reaſonable Creatures, as well as his Goodneſs. It muſt then be ſaid, that God did not ſo deſign the Intereſt and Happineſs of every particular Creature, as to have this ſingly in View; and that when he made reaſonable Beings, moral Agents, and endued them with Underſtanding, Will, and active Powers, he did not deſign to make them happy at any rate, but only in ſuch a way as is moſt ſuitable to the Order of Things, and to his own rectoral Wiſdom and Purity.

This Writer himſelf often tells us, that God *acts in a conſtant Conformity to the Nature and Reaſon of Things*; and that *it is a Contradiction to his Nature to do any thing that is not fit and reaſonable*, p. 26. Now in judging of what is fit and reaſonable, not meerly the Intereſt or Benefit of any particular Being or Beings muſt be conſider'd, but what is moſt becoming God as the moſt wiſe and righteous Governor of the World, and what all Things conſider'd is beſt upon the whole and fitteſt to be done. It is therefore an unwarrantable Preſumption in this Author to pronounce ſo poſitively

tively as he does, that " God can require no-
" thing of Men, but what they for their own
" Interest, tho' there were no positive divine
" Commands were oblig'd to do, p. 359. I grant that it is reasonable to suppose that God will always make it the Interest of his Creatures to obey his Laws by amply rewarding their Obedience; that he can require nothing that is in it self, all Circumstances consider'd, unfit and cruel and unjust; he cannot require a Creature to go on in a Course that will necessarily and eternally make that Creature miserable; but to say he can require nothing but what in it self in that very Instance, and abstractly from any Reward attending it, tends in the Nature of Things to that Creature's Benefit, is to entertain very narrow Notions of the divine Dominion, and to deny God a Power which is easily allow'd to earthly Parents and Masters. The supreme Governor of the World may see it fit for very wise Ends to require a Thing that does not immediately and in it self by any natural Consequence or necessary Result of Things tend to the Benefit of the Creatures of whom he requires it, yea he may in particular Instances require a Thing that may seem to be a Hardship in it self consider'd, abstracted from the Reward with which he will crown that Obedience; and in that Case, tho' his Goodness is such, that in the final Issue the Reward he will confer shall make an ample Compensation for the temporal Inconveniencies they suffer, yet it cou'd not be said that the Thing requir'd was in it self and antecedently for their Interest,

reſt, and what they wou'd have choſen or been oblig'd to do if God had not enjoin'd it. It may be an End worthy of God to exerciſe the Obedience of his reaſonable Creatures in ſome ſuch Inſtances, to give them an Opportunity to ſhew their ready and intire Submiſſion even where their own Intereſt is not immediately concern'd; yea even where in ſome particular Caſes it may ſeem to be againſt their preſent Intereſt. Hereby their Subjection to him, and Regard for him, their intire Reſignation to the Authority and Wiſdom of the ſupreme univerſal Lord (which is an excellent Diſpoſition highly becoming reaſonable Creatures) wou'd be more eminently conſpicuous, and the Beauty of their diſintereſted Obedience wou'd be more remarkably diſplay'd and exercis'd, and yield a glorious Example to the moral World.

The Sum is this: Our Author affirms, that becauſe God is happy in himſelf, he can only have in view the Good of his Creatures; from whence he infers two Things, the one is, that God can in no Caſe require any thing of any Creature, but what tends in that very inſtance naturally and neceſſarily to that Creature's Benefit, and therefore cannot give any poſitive Precepts: The other is, that he cannot lay any Puniſhment upon any Creature but what tends to the Benefit and Happineſs of that particular Creature. Now the Principle will not ſupport either of theſe Inferences; for beſides that it muſt be ſaid that tho' in making Creatures and in giving them Laws, or in executing thoſe Laws, God cannot have in View the adding any thing to his

his own essential Happiness and Perfection, yet he must have in view the acting agreeably to his own Perfections; and that consequently not meer Goodness or Beneficence is to be consider'd, but as in Conjunction with and under the Direction of infinite Wisdom and Righteousness; besides this I say, when we speak of his having in view the *Good of the Governed*, the only just Sense in which this can be understood is, that he has always in view the Good of the Whole; and the Good of the whole necessarily takes in whatever tends to the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of the moral World, to which the Interests of any particular Being or Beings must give way. Now it does not follow from God's having always in view the Good of the whole, or the universal Order of Things, that therefore he can require nothing of any Creature, but what naturally and necessarily tends in that very Instance to the Benefit of that particular Creature; for it may be for the Good of the whole, and may have a Beauty and Congruity in it, that some Commands be laid upon the Creatures, in which their own private Interest is not directly and immediately concern'd; [though if we speak of positive Precepts, which the Author has particularly in view, it has been shewn that these have a Tendency to our own Benefit, though not absolutely and in themselves consider'd, yet as they are circumstanc'd, and taken in the manner and for the Purposes for which they are appointed by God] nor does it follow, that in inflicting Punishments God must always have in view the

particular Benefit of the Perſon puniſh'd; for though it may tend to the Hurt and Miſery of the particular Being or Beings that are puniſh'd, yet it may be highly for the Benefit of the whole, and for maintaining the Peace and Order and Harmony of the moral Syſtem: As this Gentleman himſelf ſays, that *Pardon may be an Act of Mercy to the Criminal, but Injuſtice to the Publick*, p. 41. But this I ſhall have Occaſion to conſider more largely afterwards.

I now proceed to another Part of the Author's Scheme. The former related to God's Actings towards us, this relates to Man's own Actings; and he ſeems to reſolve all our Obedience wholly into a Regard to our own Happineſs and Intereſt; and that this is to be the only Meaſure of our Duty, and the ultimate End we are to have in view.

He tells us, that "*the Deſire of Happineſs* "*is the only innate Principle in Mankind*, p. 20, 363. That "the Spring of all the Actions "of the Creatures is their own Good, p. 16. And accordingly he plainly aſſerts, that "*no* "*Man can be oblig'd to do any thing, that* "*does not ſome way or other contribute to* "*his Happineſs*; yea except he is convinc'd that that particular Thing has a Tendency in its own Nature to his Intereſt; for this ſeems to be his Meaning, ſince he immediately adds, that "conſequently according to the Senſe "Men have of their own Happineſs, and of "the Means which will *naturally* promote "it, they will aſſuredly attain the Knowledge "of

" of their respective Duties, p. 23." Our own Interest then is the single Point we are to have in view, and by this we are in all Cases to judge of our Duty. We must act in all we do, even in those Duties of Religion that are more immediately directed to God, and of which he is the immediate Object, not from a Regard to God but to our selves. We are not to do any thing in Religion for his sake, but for our own. We are either to have no distinct Regard to the Divine Dignity and Glory, or else to consider it only as subordinate to our own Interest. Thus Man is made his own ultimate End, and all his Views must terminate in himself. If we love and honour God, still it must be only or principally for our own sakes. Thus he tells us, that " the Difference between the Supreme Being " infinitely happy in himself, and the Crea- " tures who are not so, is, that all his Actions, " in relation to his Creatures, flow from a pure " disinterested Love; whereas the Spring of " all the Actions of the Creatures is their own " Good; we love God because he first loved " us; and consequently our Love to him will " be in Proportion to our Sense of his Good- " ness to us, p. 16." There is therefore, according to him, no such Thing amongst the Creatures as a disinterested Love and Goodness; all flows from a pure Regard to their own Interest. Yet he that says this, has the Confidence to represent himself and his Friends, as alone standing up for a disinterested Virtue; as *govern'd not by servile Motives, but by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of*

Things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God; that *this is true Deism*; and that *they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of true Deists*, p. 368. But how can he say they *act not from ſervile Motives* (by which he there evidently means, acting not from a View to their own Intereſt and Advantage) *but in Conformity to the Nature of God*, when in the Paſſage juſt now cited he makes a diſintereſted Love and Goodneſs peculiar to God, and that the Spring of all the Creatures Actions is their own Good, and all our Love is intereſted, and purely for our own Sakes?

Yet the ſame Writer, with whom it is a familiar thing to contradict himſelf, alſo declares, that "as God has implanted in Bodies, in or-"der to preſerve the natural World, a Ten-"dency to each other, ſo he has implanted "in Minds, the better to ſupport the moral "World, a Tendency to be kind and benefi-"cent to one another; and ſo deep is the "Impreſſion of Benevolence, that we can't "but applaud a Perſon who does brave and "generous Actions, though we ſuffer by 'em; "and as much condemn him who acts baſely "and treacherouſly, though we are ever ſo "great Gainers, p. 73." Here he makes a diſintereſted Benevolence towards Mankind, and a diſintereſted Love of Virtue to be implanted in us, diſtinct from the Principle of Self-love, or the Deſire of our own Happineſs, which at other Times he affirms to be the only innate Principle in Mankind. And why then

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shou'd he not also suppose a Love to God for his own intrinsick Excellency and Beauty, and not meerly for his Goodness to us in particular? Indeed his Goodness to us, or the Benefits we receive from him, may be the first Motives and Inducements to our Love, in which Sense that Passage of Scripture is to be understood, which he mentions, that *we love God because he first loved us*. But this is not the only Reason of our Love, but chiefly his universal Goodness and essential Excellency, as he is in himself the supreme Good, the original Beauty, and therefore the first Amiable. In loving and esteeming him, we must not meerly consider his Beneficence to us in particular; but it is his transcendent Excellency and Perfection, his infinite Amiableness in himself, as comprehending whatever is wise and just and perfect and lovely, that renders him the primary and the worthiest Object of the Love and Esteem of all reasonable Beings; as by the Author's own Acknowledgment we cannot but conceive the highest Love and Esteem for an amiable and perfect Character, even abstracting from the Consideration of any private Benefit and Advantage we our selves reap from it.

I can't help thinking that this Part of the Author's Scheme, which teaches us to measure our Duty wholly by our Interest, and makes this the single Point to which we are to direct all our Actions and all our Views, is mean and selfish, and contrary to the just Order of Things. If we compare his Morality in this Respect with that of the Gospel, we shall easily

ſily ſee a vaſt Difference between them. His all tends to ſelf and terminates there, low and narrow in its Views, makes the Creature and its own ſelfiſh Intereſts its own ultimate End; but that of the Goſpel (tho' it does not oblige us to lay aſide all Regard to our ſelves and our own Intereſts, yea opens the Way for our obtaining the nobleſt Happineſs our Natures are capable of) carries the Soul beyond it ſelf to God, teacheth us to direct our Thoughts and Views principally and ultimately to him, to ſubject our Wills and our own narrow Intereſts to his Will and to his Glory; in a word, to make him our higheſt End, and to live not to our ſelves, but unto him *of whom and thro' whom and to whom are all Things.* And this is agreeable to the juſt Order and Reaſon of Things. For what is more evident than that as God is the chiefeſt Good, ſo he is alſo the higheſt End, to which the Aims and Views of reaſonable Creatures in their ſeveral Orders and Degrees ſhould ultimately tend? and in this the Beauty and Harmony of the rational Creation does conſiſt, when all tend to God as their common Center, and all have a Reference to him as their common End, who otherwiſe wou'd be endleſly divided, if they made each of them their own particular Intereſt their chief End.

This leads me to another Part of our Author's Scheme, where he ſeems to make the whole of Religion to conſiſt in our doing Good to our Fellow-Creatures. Indeed I don't well ſee how this can be maintain'd upon his Principles;

ples; he ought rather to ſay that the whole of Religion conſiſts in doing Good to our ſelves, and in purſuing our own Intereſts. Accordingly he declares that "whoever acts what is *beſt* "*for himſelf* both in a publick and private Ca- "pacity, does all that God or Man can re- "quire, p. 21. and he tells us, in the Paſſage cited before, "that the only innate Princi- "ple in Man is the Deſire of *his own Happi-* "*neſs*; and the Goodneſs of God requires no "more than a right cultivating this Principle, p. 363. he adds indeed, "in preferring a ge- "neral or publick to a particular or private "Good, and where there are two Evils, and "both can't be avoided, to chuſe the leſs, *ſub* "*Ratione boni.*" But if, as this Gentleman affirms, *the only innate Principle in Man is a Deſire of his own Happineſs*, I can't ſee what Obligation he is under, according to this Author, to prefer a general or publick to his own particular or private Good. For his own Happineſs is what he is to have principally in View, nor is he properly to concern himſelf about any thing but what tends to his own Good; this is ſtill to be his ultimate End to which every thing elſe muſt be ſubordinate; and in doing this he acts up to the *only innate Principle* or Law by which he is to govern himſelf. If the only Spring of the Creature's Actions be their own Good, and if "*ac-* "*cording to the Senſe Men have of their* "*own Happineſs, and of the Means that* "*naturally tend to promote it, they will aſ-* "*ſuredly attain the Knowledge of their re-*

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" *ſpective Duties*, as this Gentleman aſſerts in the Paſſages before cited, then ſuppoſing the general or publick to come in Competition with a Man's own particular or private Good (which is the Caſe he puts, or elſe there wou'd be no Need of talking of preferring the one to the other) I don't ſee but upon his Principles, it wou'd be his Duty to prefer his own Good to that of the publick; and tho' he might regard the publick Damage and his own, as both of 'em Evils, yet he ought to regard the former as the leſſer Evil, and therefore to chuſe it, *ſub Ratione boni.* He ought, if the Maxims advanc'd by this Gentleman be true, in no Caſe to deny his own private Intereſt for the Good of others, or to ſacrifice his own Life or Fortune for the Good of his Country; but if he can ſecure himſelf and his own particular Intereſts, he does all that is required of him, whatever becomes of his Neighbour or his Country; it appears to me therefore that upon the Principles advanc'd by this Author, there is no Room left for the Exerciſe of that extenſive glorious Benevolence, that publick Spirit, which is one of the nobleſt Ornaments of the human Nature, and which this Gentleman wou'd be thought ſo highly to promote and to admire.

But let us ſuppoſe that he can, conſiſtently with his other Principles, carry publick Spirit and Benevolence towards Mankind to the greateſt Height, yet to make this the whole of Religion is contrary to Reaſon and the Law of Nature. I ſhall conſider this a little; and the rather becauſe I have obſerv'd that ſome, under

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Pretence of crying up Charity or Benevolence towards Mankind, ſeem to place the whole of our Duty in it, and ſpeak in very diminiſhing Terms of all that Part of Religion that relates to the Duties we more immediately owe to God, and all upon this Principle, that God is happy in himſelf, and can receive no Benefit from any Worſhip or Services we can render him.

It muſt be own'd indeed, that our Author in ſeveral Parts of his Book, ſeems to ſpeak of the Duties we owe to God as no leſs a Part of the Law of Nature, than thoſe we owe to our Neighbours; but ſince there are ſo many plain and formal Paſſages, in which he directly places the whole of Religion in doing good to Mankind, and aſſerts that they that do ſo fulfil the whole of their Duty, and do all that God requires, many will be apt to think that what he talks of our Duty to God is only to ſave Appearances; or elſe that by our Duty to God he means no more than Benevolence to Mankind, this being all that God requires, and the only way by which (as he tells us) we can ſhew our Gratitude to our Maker. Accordingly he declares, that *the Duty of a truly religious Perſon, and of a good Subject and Citizen and of a Patriot, are the ſame with relation to God and Man*, p. 71. It will be eaſily own'd, that true Religion includes the Duties of a good Subject and Citizen or Patriot; but the Author ſeems (as far as I can underſtand him) to intend to make Patriotiſm and the being a good Subject or Citizen to be the whole

of true Religion, and that theſe are exactly of the ſame Extent; ſo that every Man that is a good Subject and Patriot, by that fulfils the Character of a truly religious Man. And yet it muſt be own'd, that there have been Men that have had a true Love to their Country, and Zeal for its Liberties, that yet have had little Regard to that Part of Religion that relates to the Duties we more immediately owe to God. The Author therefore, if he ſuppoſes that to be a Patriot or a good Citizen is to be truly religious, muſt alſo ſuppoſe that the whole of Religion conſiſts in civil and ſocial Duties. To this Purpoſe he declares, p. 72. that "as "Man is qualified by Nature to anſwer all the "Purpoſes of a ſocial Life, and to act a Part "agreeable to Reaſon, ſo by doing this he "gives Glory to his Maker by fulfilling the "End of his Creation." And it appears from the Paſſages above cited, p. 162, 163. to which the Reader is referr'd, that he directly defines Religion to conſiſt in a conſtant Diſpoſition of Mind to do all the Good we can, *viz.* to Mankind; and that Religion, as well as Government, was *wholly* ordain'd for Men's mutual Defence; and that by doing good to our Fellow-Creatures we anſwer the End of our Creation, and *do all that God requires of us*; and whereas Dr. *Clark* had ſaid, that the Philoſophers had no right Knowledge of God's Deſign in creating Man, he produces a Paſſage of *Cicero* as containing a juſt Account of the End for which Man was created, the Deſign of which Paſſage is to ſhew that Men were created

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for the sake of one another, for their mutual Assistance and Defence; *Ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse; homines hominum causa sunt generati, ut ipsi inter se alii aliis prodesse possint. Hominem naturæ obedientem homini nocere non posse.* And then he adds, "Does not Dr. *Clark* maintain the same Thing, in saying that God "cou'd have no Motive in creating Things at "first, but only that he might communicate "to them his Goodness and Happiness? p. 384. Now either our Author looks upon this Passage of *Cicero* as containing a full Account of God's Design in creating Man or not; if not, if it only contains a defective Account of the End of Man's Creation, and omits some of the principal and noblest Ends of his Being, then the Doctor's Charge holds good for any thing this Author hath said to the contrary, and this Passage of *Cicero* does by no means prove that he had a just Knowledge of the End for which Man was created. But if this Gentleman looks upon this Passage to contain a just and full Account of God's Design in creating Man, as he must if he speaks here at all to the Purpose, then the only End for which Men were at all created was to assist and to do good to one another; and indeed this is what the Author himself directly asserts in several of the Passages above cited; and then he that does this, answers the End of his Being, and fulfils the whole of his Duty, even though he shou'd not acknowledge a God at all, or a Providence, or yield him any Worship. These Things may safely and even

innocently be neglected, as not properly and immediately belonging to the End for which Man was created. And is not this to deſtroy at once a conſiderable Part of what this Gentleman himſelf elſewhere ſeems to own to belong to the Law of Nature? Is this the Way he takes to reclaim an ignorant World from Superſtition, by letting them know there is no ſuch thing properly as Religion at all, or any immediate Regard due to God, and that provided they be good Neighbours and Citizens, they need not concern themſelves about God at all, or any of the Duties of which he is the immediate Object? A goodly Scheme this, which under Pretence of exalted Thoughts of God's Self-ſufficiency, or Happineſs in himſelf, is for depriving him of that religious Homage, which is due to him from his reaſonable Creatures!

I intirely agree with the learned Dr. *Clark*, "That there is no Congruity or Proportion in "the uniform Diſpoſition and correſpondent "Order of any Bodies or Magnitudes; no "Fitneſs or Agreement in the Application of "ſimilar and equal geometrical Figures one "to another, or in the comparing them one "with another, ſo viſible and conſpicuous as "is the Beauty and Harmony of God's ſeveral "Attributes meeting with ſuitable Returns of "Duty and Honour from all his rational Crea"tures throughout the Univerſe." *Diſc. nat. and rev. Religion, 7th Edit. p.* 198. And he goes on to ſhew, from the Conſideration of his ſeveral Attributes, that it is our Duty to have a per-

perpetual awful Regard for him, to love him, to trust in him, to pay him all possible Honour and Veneration, Adoration and Worship, to employ our whole Beings and all our Faculties in his Service and for his Glory, to pray to him constantly for what we stand in need of, and offer him our heartiest Thanksgivings for whatever good Things we at any Time receive.

Indeed these are Duties of perpetual and unalterable Obligation, necessarily resulting from the Relation we stand under to God as our Creator, Preserver and Benefactor, and our moral Governor and Judge, and therefore cannot possibly cease to oblige whilst that Relation subsists; and the Relation subsists in all supposable Circumstances, whilst our Being subsists. To hate God, to blaspheme him, to despise his Authority, must eternally be a Vice and a Crime, and no Alteration of Circumstances can ever make that to be lawful, because it has an intrinsick inseparable Malignity in it. But it is otherwise with respect to many of the Duties we owe to our Fellow-Creatures. It seems therefore very strange that whilst these Gentlemen cry up the Reason and Nature of Things for the eternal Rule and Law, and explain this Nature and Reason of Things to be the Relations and Respects Things bear to one another, and the Fitnesses arising from those Relations, they yet comparatively make light of those Relations and Fitnesses that are of all others the strongest, the most inseparable, the most deeply founded, and which cannot cease but with our Beings, when other particular Relations

ons and the Fitneſſes ariſing from them admit of great Variation, and upon an Alteration of Circumſtances may ceaſe to oblige. If there be a Relation between God and Man diſtinct from the Relation Men bear to one another, then there muſt be Duties alſo ariſing from that Relation to God diſtinct from the Duties Men owe to themſelves and their Fellow-Creatures; Duties of which God himſelf is the immediate Object; and if the Relation between God and us is of all others the moſt ſacred and immutable, then the Duties we more immediately owe to him, muſt alſo be the moſt ſacred Part of our Duty. If therefore the Nature and Reaſon of Things is the Rule and Law by which Men muſt govern their Actions, and if it be the Will of God they ſhou'd do ſo, then it is his Will, and the End he made them for, that they ſhou'd act correſpondently to the Relation they bear immediately to him as well as to the Relations they bear to one another; and conſequently they who do what Good they can to themſelves and their Fellow-Creatures, except they act alſo ſuitably to the Relations they more immediately owe to God, and be careful to render him that Love, Reſignation, Adoration, and Obedience, which is due to him from his reaſonable Creatures, are ſo far from anſwering the End of their Creation, that they are very defective in the principal End of it, and in the nobleſt Part of their Duty. The Relation between God and the Creatures is the fundamental Relation which lies at the Foundation of all others, and in a great Meaſure gives them

them their binding Force. It is therefore of the highest Importance to the Peace, the Order and Harmony of the moral World, that the profoundest Reverence for the Deity, and an inviolable Regard to him, and Fear of offending him be preserv'd in the Minds of all reasonable Beings.

Nor is it any Objection against this, that God is infinitely happy in himself, and therefore stands in no Need of our Services. For it does not follow that because he does not need our Praises and Adorations, therefore we are not oblig'd to render him any. This wou'd be to make the very Perfection and Excellency of his Nature, an Argument for our neglecting him. For the Reason why we cannot profit him is only the transcendent Excellency of his Nature; and this Perfection of his Nature, which raises him above all Possibility of receiving any real Benefit from any thing we can do, does also make it most fit and reasonable that we shou'd have the highest Esteem and Veneration for him, and render him that Tribute of Homage and Adoration, which is most justly due from reasonable Creatures to the supreme Being. Tho' God be infinitely happy in himself, and does not in making Creatures, or giving them Laws, design to make any Addition to his own essential Happiness and Perfection, which is impossible; and tho' in this Sense it may be said that God *does not require any thing, no not the Worship we are to render him, or the Faith we are to have in him for his own Sake*, (as our Author expresses it,

p. 44.)

p. 44.) that is, for his own Benefit, as if he himself were to be a Gainer by it; yet if he makes reasonable Beings, he must require them to act towards him, as becomes reasonable Beings to act towards the supreme universal Lord, their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and must give them such Laws as are agreeable to the just Order of Things and to the Relations between him and them. His being perfectly happy in himself is no Reason for his not requiring of his Creatures such Duties as it is in the Nature of Things fit and reasonable for him to require. Now what can be in it self more fit and reasonable, and more agreeable to the beautiful Order of Things, than that reasonable Creatures, that derive their Beings and all the Blessings they enjoy from God, and continually depend upon him, and who have sublime Faculties, capable of contemplating, loving, adoring the supreme Being, shou'd love and serve and worship him above all, and shou'd continually testify their Dependance upon him by their Prayers, and celebrate his transcendent Excellencies and marvellous Benefits by their Praises?

Is it not infinitely just, that we shou'd feel the inward warm Sentiments of Love and Veneration and Gratitude towards that glorious Being? And if so, is it not fit that we shou'd express them in the best Manner we are able, by our adoring Praises and Acknowledgments, testifying with a generous Ardor to the whole Creation, as far as our Influence reaches, the Esteem, the Love and Admiration we have for our

our common Lord? And endeavouring to excite the same pious Sentiments, and Affections in others which we feel in our selves, that they may join with us in the same noble and delightful Exercise, and in rendring our united Homage to the Supreme? Is there not an admirable Beauty, a Decency and Congruity in seeing reasonable Creatures thus employ'd? Their Understandings, their Wills and Affections centering on the most excellent of all Objects, their Love and Desires carried forth towards the chiefest Good, the greatest and most perfect Being, the original Goodness and Beauty? Shou'd not a Regard to him run through their whole Behaviour, and be the principal noble Spring of all their Obedience? This must needs be pleasing to God, who takes a divine Complacency in the Beauty, Order, and Felicity of the rational Creation. To suppose God pleas'd with the Prayers and Praises, the Homage proceeding from a Heart sincerely devoted to him, is not to suppose him, as some meanly represent it, *acted by a Love of Fame and Glory*, or as this Author expresses it, p. 46. *subject to the Passions of ambitious and vainglorious Mortals*, but it is because he delights (and the Perfection of his Nature carries him to do so) in the moral Order and Beauty of Things, in Righteousness and Gratitude, and in seeing his reasonable Creatures employ the excellent Faculties he has given them in the best and propereſt Manner.

And indeed to suppose a rational Being to have a Regard to his Fellow-Creatures, but no

Regard at all to his Maker, is a monſtrous Blot and Irregularity in the Creation. Reaſon leads us to conclude, that the infinitely wiſe and perfect Being, in making noble intellectual Creatures, deſign'd that in their ſeveral Orders and Degrees they ſhou'd tend to him as their common Center, and to him ultimately direct their Views, and not meerly to themſelves and to one another? Can it be reaſonably thought that in creating them he deſign'd they ſhou'd have a Regard to one another, and no immediate Regard to him? That their Affections ſhou'd be carried out towards their Fellow-Creatures, and not principally to him the moſt perfect of Beings, the kind Parent and ſovereign Lord of the Univerſe, from whom all their Bleſſings flow, and on whom they conſtantly depend? Indeed never are reaſonable Creatures ſo happily and glorioufly employ'd, as when ingag'd in the Contemplation, Love, and Adoration of the ſupreme Being. It is then that the ſublime Faculties of the human Soul appear in their proper Glory and Elevation. And if the chief Happineſs of reaſonable Beings conſiſts in the Exerciſe of their Powers and Affections on the nobleſt Objects, then the Exerciſe of thoſe Duties they more immediately owe to God, tend to their own higheſt Happineſs; ſo that if God wills their Good and Happineſs, (which is the Author's own Suppoſition) and that they ſhou'd act up to the Dignity of their Natures, (in which he makes their Happineſs to conſiſt, ſee Chap. 3d.) he wills that they ſhou'd exerciſe themſelves in thoſe Duties that have a more imme-

immediate Reference to him, as well as in the Duties that more immediately refer to their Fellow-Creatures.

Thoſe therefore are far from being Friends to Mankind, that lead them to diſregard thoſe Duties which have ſuch a Beauty and Excellency in them, which tend ſo much to the Order and Harmony of the moral World, and to the Satisfaction and Happineſs of the reaſonable Creatures themſelves, and the Exerciſe of their moſt delightful Affections. And it is one great Excellency of the Scriptures, that they every where preſcribe the Love, the Reverence, the Adoration of the only true God, and furniſh us with the beſt Helps and nobleſt Patterns of a pure and ſublime Devotion.

It is far from my Deſign to inſinuate the leaſt Diſregard to that noble Duty of Love and Beneficence towards Mankind; a Thing for which we were evidently deſign'd; I freely own that it is one excellent End of our Creation to do good to our Fellow-Creatures, to aſſiſt one another, and to promote our mutual Intereſts. But we muſt not, under Pretence of urging and exalting this, repreſent it as the whole of our Duty. No where is this mutual Benevolence ſo ſtrongly recommended, ſo beautifully exemplified as in the Goſpel of Jeſus; but it does not cauſe all our Views to terminate there; it teaches us *to love the Lord our God with all our Hearts*, &c. that this is the firſt and great Commandment; and then it teaches us alſo *to love our Neighbours as our ſelves*, which it carries much further than this Gentle-

man with all his boasted Benevolence seems willing to do, since it requires us to love and do good even to our Enemies, which he is pleas'd to find fault with. Thus it represents our Duties in their proper beautiful Order and just Harmony. Our Author sometimes makes a Shew of doing this, when he distributes our Duty into that we owe to God, our Neighbours and our selves. Our Duty therefore to our Neighbours is not all Religion. All our Duty is not absolv'd in this, nor is it reducible meerly to this one Point. Why then does he so often represent it so, as if by this alone we answer'd the End of our Creation, and did all that God requires? Is not this to give a very defective Account even of natural Religion, and to lead Men wrong in a Point of great Consequence to the Interests of Religion in the World?

I shall conclude my Remarks on the Author's Account of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature with some Observations on his boasted Rule, the Usefulness of which he so much extols, p. 345. 349, 350. He tells us, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which "makes them either good or bad, they that "tend to promote human Happiness are al-"ways good, and those that have a contrary "Tendency are always bad; and 'tis the Cir-"cumstances Men are under by which we are "to judge of the Tendency of Actions." This is, according to him, "the only standing Law "or Rule by which it is the Will of God Men "shou'd be directed and govern'd in all Cases;

see

see p. 18, 19. So that after all his Pretences, this is really all that he means by that Law of Nature, the Perfection, Immutability, and Clearness of which he so much extols. And if we are to judge of this Rule or Law by the Maxims our Author advances, "that the only "innate Principle in Man is the Desire of his "own Happiness;" and that "according to "the Sense Men have of their own Happiness, "and of the Means that naturally tend to pro- "mote it, they will assuredly attain the "Knowledge of their respective Duties;" we must explain it thus, that every Man must judge of his Duty, and of the Goodness of Actions, by their Tendency to promote his own particular Happiness in the Circumstances he is in. And if this be the only standing Rule or Law by which Men are to be directed; if every Man must be left to judge of Good or Evil by what he apprehends to be for his own Advantage or the contrary in the Circumstances he is under, which Circumstances, as the Author himself tells us, are *continually changing*, p. 18. if there be no more fixed Rules for the Morality of Actions, it will be left very loose and undeterminate.

But that we may the better judge of the Usefulness of this Rule, let us consider the Application he himself makes of it. It is this, according to him, must direct us when we are to speak Truth. For it may be lawful, and even a Duty when we apprehend that our Good requires it, to speak contrary to Truth, and to our own Sentiments; see p. 347. He there tells

tells us, that "though Speech was given Men "to communicate their Thoughts, and 'tis "generally for their common Good that Men "ſhou'd ſpeak as they think; yet this com- "mon Good preſcribes certain Reſtrictions." He here indeed mentions the *common Good*, but it appears from what he afterwards offers on this Head, that he thinks alſo Men's own particular or private Good to be a ſufficient Reaſon for ſpeaking contrary to Truth. But what does he mean here by the *common Good?* If he means the common Good of the World or of Mankind, I think it might be eaſily ſhewn, that it is for the common Good of all Mankind that the Laws of Truth ſhould be conſtantly obſerv'd; and though this may in particular Inſtances bring Inconveniences, yet if Men wou'd not allow themſelves to tell Lies on any Occaſion, it wou'd be highly for the Benefit of the World in general. But if by *common Good* he means only that which ſeems in a particular Inſtance to be for the Good of the Nation or Community to which we belong, then what he calls the common Good is really no other than the private Advantage of that particular Nation or Society. And if Truth and Sincerity may be violated as often as it ſeems in a particular Inſtance to be for the Benefit of any particular Community, I don't ſee how the publick Faith of Nations can be preſerv'd; ſince one Nation or Community has as much a Right to practiſe this Maxim as another; and ſo all Nations are left to break their Faith whenever they think it for their Advantage to do ſo. And

if

if this be lawful for a larger Society with respect to another such Society, why not also to lesser Societies with regard to one another, and if for Families, why not also for particular Persons? And indeed so the Author seems to take it, as will appear afterwards. But let us proceed to the Instances he mentions. "De- "ceiving an Enemy (says he) in a just War, "either by Words or Actions, if it tends to "bring about the End of War, Peace, is cer- "tainly a Duty." Here he makes it not only lawful, but a Duty, to deceive an Enemy whether by Words or Actions; and all the Restriction he adds is only this, *if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace*; so that, according to him, any Breach of Word or Promise, or even of an Oath, if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace, is not only lawful but a Duty. What a wide Door does this open? But is not the Breach of Faith counted base even in an Enemy? And I am persuaded that, in the common Judgment of Mankind, those wou'd be justly censur'd and despis'd that wou'd make use of such unfair and dishonourable Methods, as this Gentleman here not only allows but prescribes.

He goes on, "And the same Reason obliges "People not to keep those Promises, though "sworn to, which they have been forc'd to "make to Robbers and Thieves." Here again he represents People as not only allow'd but *oblig'd* to break their Words and Oaths made to Thieves and Robbers; but this is not true, except the Matter of the Oath or Promise

miſe be unlawful. It does not ceaſe to oblige, meerly becauſe made to a Thief or Robber. For at that rate we muſt judge of the Obligation of an Oath meerly by the Condition of the Perſon to whom it is made; but if the Matter of the Oath or Promiſe be in it ſelf lawful, and ſubjects thoſe that have made it not to a Crime, but only to an Inconvenience, it binds to a Performance; and if the Matter of the Oath or Promiſe be in it ſelf unlawful, the making ſuch a Promiſe or Oath was a Fault, though the Conſtraint they were under may furniſh ſome Excuſe for it. I cannot but approve what the learned Dr. *Clark* ſays on this Head, *Diſt. nat. and rev. Religion*, *p.* 224. "He who "thinks it Right and Juſt upon Account of "publick Utility, to break Faith (ſuppoſe) "with a Robber, let him conſider that 'tis "much more uſeful to do the ſame by a Multi"tude of Robbers, by Tyrants, by a Nation "of Robbers; and then all Faith is evident"ly at an End. For *mutato nomine de te.*— "What Fidelity and Truth are is underſtood "by every Man; but between two Nations "at War, who ſhall be Judge which of them "are the Robbers? Beſides, to rob a Man "of Truth and of eternal Happineſs, is worſe "than robbing him of his Money and of his "temporal Happineſs; and therefore it will "be ſaid, that Hereticks may even more juſt"ly, and with much greater Utility to the "Publick, be deceiv'd and deſtroy'd by Breach "of Truth and Faith, than the moſt cruel "Robbers. Where does this terminate?

That

That this is a very just Observation, will appear by considering what our Author further offers, "and some (says he) go so far as to "think that those who wou'd force others to "declare their Opinions to their own Preju-"dice, in such Matters where the Govern-"ment has no Concern, have no more Right "to Truth than Robbers and other publick E-"nemies." It is plain from his Manner of introducing this, that this is his own Sentiment. As he thinks that Robbers and other *publick Enemies have no Right to Truth*, that is, that it is lawful to lie and to swear falsly to them, so also that Men may lawfully do the same to all that they apprehend erect an unwarrantable Tyranny over them, and wou'd force them to declare their Opinions to their own Prejudice: It is lawful in such Cases for Men to give a wrong Account of their Opinions; to profess, and if requir'd to swear, that they believe that to be true, which they believe to be false. And if this be the Case, I don't wonder that this Gentleman and those of his Complexion, make the Constancy of the Martyrs that have suffered great Hardships, and expos'd themselves to Death it self for the Sake of Truth and a good Conscience, the Subject of their Ridicule. And the same Reasoning wou'd extend to all that we apprehend make unreasonable Demands upon us, even in civil and political Matters; it might be equally said according to this Author, that they *have no Right to Truth*; and therefore that it is lawful to flatter a Tyrant, and declare for the Principles

of Tyranny, if requir'd to do ſo, yea and to ſwear to them too, rather than run any Hazard; a Thing which I am perſuaded many of the brave ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, whom this Gentleman ſo much admires, wou'd have ſcorn'd and abhorr'd. I don't ſee but his Principles wou'd allow him, to act the Part of a conſummate Hypocrite, and to ſacrifice Truth, Honour, and Conſcience, to his own Eaſe and Safety.

He goes on, "Friendſhip (ſays he) will "ſometimes oblige Men to deceive People "when it manifeſtly tends to their Good, and "none are prejudic'd by it; and all practiſe it "with relation to Children, ſick People, and "Men in Paſſion." But I think the Benefit that can accrue to Children in any inſtance by deceiving them with Lies and falſe Promiſes, is not equivalent to the Prejudice it may do them; and thoſe certainly moſt conſult their Benefit who take care by their own Practice as well as Inſtructions to bring them up to a Horror for a Lie, and a ſtrict Regard to Truth and Honour. Our Author allows and even requires us in many Caſes to tell Lies not only *to ſick People, but to Men in Paſſion*; and why not alſo to Men under the Influence of any ſtrong Appetite, or engag'd in any warm Purſuit of Ambition, Avarice, or Pleaſure? he thinks *we are oblig'd to deceive People* with Lies and Falſhoods when it tends to their Good; and if we may be oblig'd to do ſo for the Good of others, why not alſo for our own? it will be eaſily own'd that a Lie may in many Caſes an-

answer a present End or Convenience, either to our selves or others; and if it must be allow'd as often as it does so, this is to give a large Scope to Falshood and Deceit; it is to suppose that a Lie is in it self a Matter of meer Indifference, neither Good nor Evil, but as it is circumstanc'd; and that Truth is so too; so that they are both put upon a Level; neither of 'em good or bad in their own Nature; and then I can't see why a Liar shou'd be so base and infamous a Character in all Ages. But if a Lie be in it self evil, then it is not to be allow'd, because it may in some particular Cases seem to answer a good end; tho' certainly it never tends to the Good of the Whole.

The Author adds, "must he not be an ill "Man indeed, who wou'd not save an inno- "cent Person by telling his Pursuer a Falshood! "this is a Duty he owes to both, the Pursuer "and Pursued." This is the strongest Case he puts, and if he confin'd it to such extraordinary Instances he wou'd have been more excusable. But might not a Man refuse to declare to the Pursuer which way the innocent Person took? in this Case he wou'd neither tell a Falshood, nor endanger the Life of the Innocent. Let us suppose a Man put to his Oath in this Matter, must he also forswear himself for so good an end? this Author must undoubtedly lay upon his Principles that he ought to do so; and if a Man may swear falsly to save the Life of another, much more to save his own; and if it once be allow'd to swear falsly to save our own or other's Lives, why not to save our own

or others worldly Substance or Reputation, which to many are as dear as their Lives? And thus all Reverence for an Oath will be lost amongst Men.

But our Author proceeds. "And if Men "(as none scruple it) may bid their Servants "say, they are not at home, and do several "other Things of this Nature; why may they "not, when Silence shall be interpreted to "their Prejudice, deceive impertinent People "in such Matters wherein they have no Con-"cern?" He ought not so positively to pronounce, that none scruple to bid their Servants say they are not at home when they are so. I know many that justly scruple it. And if Truth may be sacrificed on such little Occasions, it will soon lead to Matters of greater Consequence. He adds, that *Men do several other Things of this Nature*, and if they do, it only shews that there is not such a Regard to Truth as there ought to be amongst Mankind; and the Author's Maxims are not likely to promote it. He does not explain what *those several other Things are*, but leaves the Matter at large, that People may act in them as they think fit; but he allows Persons "when Silence "shall be interpreted to their Prejudice, to de-"ceive impertinent People [by telling them Falshoods] "in such Matters wherein they "have no Concern." That is, we are allow'd to lie and to deceive, to speak Things which we know to be false, on every Occasion, as often as we think it for our Convenience to do so. And is not this utterly to lose the Horror of a Lie, to look

look upon it as an indifferent Thing, and in effect to baniſh Truth out of the World? If theſe Maxims of our Author were generally allow'd and maintain'd, no Man's Veracity, no Man's Word or Oath could be depended on, all publick and private Faith, all Credit and Confidence wou'd be loſt among Men. For if a Man may innocently lie and deceive for ſo ſmall a Matter as to get rid of Impertinence, he may do it much more to ſave his worldly Goods or his Reputation, or uphold the Credit of a Party, and indeed whenever he thinks it for his Intereſt and Convenience to do ſo.

The Author adds, "Thus you ſee there are "certain Exceptions to this Rule, (*viz.* of "ſpeaking Truth) which as well as the Rule "it ſelf are built on the Good of Mankind." But theſe *certain Exceptions to the Rule* which he ſpeaks of, do effectually deſtroy it; and ſhew that this Gentleman looks upon Truth and Falſhood to be Matters of meer Indifference, and only to be meaſured by a Man's Convenience in the Circumſtances he is under. I wou'd fain know what he thinks of the Veracity of God, whether it is contrary to his Nature to lie and to deceive; he ſeems to ſuppoſe that this is an evident Principle, p. 65. and in other Paſſages; and why ſo, but becauſe Veracity and Faithfulneſs is a Perfection, and to lie is in it ſelf a baſe thing morally evil, and therefore it is impoſſible for God to lie? And if it be, and if Religion obliges us, as this Author frequently intimates, to an Imitation of the Deity, why not alſo to imitate him in his Veracity and Truth?

But,

But, says he, *these Exceptions are built on the Good of Mankind.* They may indeed in particular Instances be for the present Advantage of particular Persons; but I can't help thinking that that Maxim of the Psalmist, when he gives it as the Character of a good Man, that he *speaketh the Truth from his Heart, and sweareth to his own Heart and changeth not*, not only is more noble in it self, but vastly more for the general Good of Mankind. And if it were once fix'd as a sacred Principle, that a Man is never to put a known Falshood upon others upon any Pretence whatsoever, it might indeed in some particular Instances produce Inconveniences to particular Persons, but it wou'd be of the greatest Benefit to Society in general, and wou'd have a manifest Tendency to banish Fraud and Falshood from among Men. Let us suppose two Societies, the one governing themselves by a strict Regard to Truth, and looking upon it as always sacred, never to be transgress'd upon any Occasion; the other govern'd by our Author's Maxims, that Truth is to be measur'd by every Man's Convenience, I may safely leave it to any Man to judge in which of those Societies there wou'd be the most Sincerity, Plainness, Honesty, and Integrity, and in Consequence of this mutual Confidence and Union among themselves and Credit with their Neighbours; and in which on the contrary there wou'd be most Hypocrisy, Fraud, Deceit, mutual Diffidence and Distrust, and consequently Breach of Union among themselves, and Want of Credit among others.

Our

Our Author concludes with assuring us, that "these Exceptions do by no means justify "mental Reservations or Equivocations. But I think no Jesuit ever carried his Doctrine on this Head further than this Gentleman, or made larger Allowances for Falshood and Deceit. I don't see but upon his Principles he may prove it to be not only lawful but a Duty to lie and to equivocate, if it be for any good End to himself or others, and what wou'd the most prevaricating Jesuit desire more? The same Principles wou'd justify the breaking Faith with Hereticks, provided a Man can but bring himself to think them as pernicious as Thieves, or as Tyrants and Impostors, or *any other publick Enemies*, which a Jesuit wou'd find no great Difficulty to do. For such Persons, according to our Author, have no Right to Truth, no nor Men in a Passion, or impertinent People, *&c.* The greatest Liar will be ready to speak Truth, when he thinks it for his Benefit in the Circumstances he is in, and I don't see that our Author requires more. He is therefore the unfittest Man in the World to find so much fault as he does with the pious Frauds of Ecclesiasticks, since it may be easily prov'd, upon his Principles, that a Lie in many Cases, when it is for a good End, is not only lawful but meritorious.

The Author supposes, that this Rule of the Tendency of Actions to a Man's Happiness in the Circumstances he is in, must also direct him when and how far he is to gratify his Passions. Every Man must be left to judge for himself how far in any particular Instance it may *conduce*

duce to his Reason, Health, and the Pleasure of his Senses, taken and compared together; this is all the Law he has to govern him in this Matter; and considering the strong Influence that the Appetites generally have over the Reason, it might be fear'd that they wou'd generally bring it over to judge in their own Favour.

But let us see how this Gentleman himself applies this Rule. He tells us, "that enjoying "a Woman, or lusting after her, can't be said, "without considering the Circumstances, to "be either good or evil; that warm Desire "which is implanted in human Nature, can't "be criminal, when pursued after such a man-"ner, as tends most to promote the Happiness "of the Persons, and to propagate and pre-"serve the Species, p. 345." These then are all the Restrictions he prescribes, and of which every Man is to be Judge according to the Circumstances he is under. If the Species be propagated and preserv'd, and the Pleasure of the Parties be promoted, this is all that is requir'd. I don't see but he leaves room for Fornication, yea and in some Cases for Adultery too, according to the Circumstances Persons may be in. This Writer elsewhere advances it as a Charge against the Laws of the Gospel, that they are too general and undeterminate, but his own Rules are vastly more so; and I am afraid that the true Ground of the Quarrel that many have with the Gospel Precepts, is for being too particular, and determining our Duty and restraining our Appetites in some Instances which these Gentlemen wou'd rather have left at large.

I shall

I shall not enter on a more particular Examination of this at present; but only observe, that considering the Strength of the sensual Appetites and Passions, if every Man was left to gratify and indulge his Appetites as far as he himself thinks reasonable, and most conducive to his Happiness in the Circumstances he is in, without any further Law to direct and govern him, it would soon produce universal Dissoluteness and Confusion.

CHAP. VIII.

That he deprives the Law of Nature of its strongest Sanctions; and that his Scheme tends to take away the Fear of God, and to make Men easy in their Sins.

HAving consider'd the Account the Author gives of the Duties of the Law of Nature, I shall now proceed to consider what he offers concerning the Sanctions of that Law; and as under the former Head it appears that the Author advances Principles which tend to lead Men wrong in their Notions of the Duties to which they are oblig'd by the Law of Nature, so I believe it will appear that he in effect destroys

thoſe Sanctions which ſhou'd inforce the Obſervance of that Law, and conſequently notwithſtanding the mighty Zeal he profeſſes for it, leaves it naked and defenceleſs, and diſarms it of its ſtrongeſt Supports. And here I muſt refer the Reader to the Paſſages produc'd above, p. 23, 214. where they are laid together in one View.

A Law may be juſtly ſaid to be left naked and defenceleſs, if it may be violated with Impunity; if either no Puniſhments be threatned at all, or none that are capable of deterring Perſons from tranſgreſſing it. And the Author's Scheme ſeems to me to be plainly calculated to take away the Dread of divine Puniſhments, and conſequently to make Sinners eaſy in their Crimes. This particularly ſeems to be the Tendency of his 4th Chapter, the Title of which runs thus, "That not only the Matter "of all God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd "to them are for the Good of Mankind, even "of thoſe who ſuffer for the Breach of them." Accordingly he will not allow, that *in puniſhing thoſe who violate his Laws God acts from a Regard to his own Honour, and the Dignity of his Laws and Government*; nor that he ever puniſhes them as for *an Injury done to himſelf, diſtinct from the Harm that accrues by the Breach of them to his Creatures*, p. 37, 38. But will this Author indeed deny that there is any ſuch thing as a Dignity belonging to the divine Laws and Government? This were in my Opinion to deny that there are any Laws of God, or that there is any divine Gover-

vernment at all. For if there be a Government, there is a Dignity belonging to that Government; and if there be Laws, there is an Authority belonging to thoſe Laws, and a Regard due to them. If God has given Laws, I ſuppoſe it muſt be own'd to be the Creature's Duty to regard and to obey them as his Laws; and if he inforces thoſe Laws by his own Authority, I ſuppoſe that it is his Will that his Creatures ſhou'd regard them as inforc'd by that Authority; but it ſeems, according to this Author, that though they are his own Laws, and inforc'd by his Authority, he muſt not have any Regard to his own Authority in puniſhing the Breach of them. This ſeems to be a ſtrange ſelf-confounding Scheme. There is a ſupreme Legiſlator, but no Dignity annex'd to that Character, or at leaſt he muſt have no Regard to it in his Conduct, as a Reaſon in any Inſtance for his Procedure. There is a Government, but no Authority belonging to it, or at leaſt he muſt not act out of a Regard to that Authority, or uſe any Methods to ſupport and maintain it. There are Laws which God has given, but for his own part he is unconcern'd whether thoſe Laws be obſerv'd or not. A Legiſlator without Dignity, a Government without Rights, a Law but without Authority. A ſtrange Repreſentation this of the divine Government, and all under Pretence of magnifying it!

But does not this Writer himſelf in this very Chapter, and in the ſame Page, talk of the *Dignity of the divine Legiſlator, his Laws and Government*, when he ſaith, p. 38. "God

" does not make Laws for one End, and re-
" quire the observing them for another, this
" being inconsistent with the Dignity of the
" divine Legislator, his Laws and Govern-
" ment?" Where he supposes, that there is a Dignity belonging to the divine Legislator, his Government and Laws, and that nothing is to be admitted which is inconsistent with it. Now if there be such a thing as the Dignity of the divine Legislator, his Laws and Government, must there not be a Regard to it in the divine Actings in the Government of the World? Does not this Gentleman often talk of the Nature and Reason of Things, as the Rule of God's Actions, and explain this to be the Relations and Respects of Things, and the Fitnesses arising from them? And does not the very Nature and Reason of Things require, that if God be the supreme Governor of the World, he shou'd act as becomes that Character? And what is more becoming that Character and Relation, than to take the most proper Methods to preserve the Majesty of his Government, and when once he hath made Laws, to vindicate and maintain the Authority of those Laws?

Our Author indeed saith, that " neither in
" punishing nor rewarding can God act as a
" Party, much less as an injur'd Party who
" wants Satisfaction and Reparation of Ho-
" nour, p. 38." But if by God's acting as a Party be meant (as must be meant in the present Debate) his acting as the wise and righteous Governor of the World, 'tis certain God acts as a

Party,

Party, or what is usually called the *Pars imperans*, and he will do nothing but what becomes that Character, and is suitable to that Relation. If as the Governor of the World he enacts Laws for his reasonable Creatures, then as the Governor of the World it concerns him to see those Laws executed, and to vindicate the Authority of those Laws; and if by *Satisfaction and Reparation of Honour* be meant the taking such Methods as are most proper to preserve and maintain the sacred Majesty of his Government, and vindicate those Laws from Contempt, his insisting on Satisfaction or Reparation in this Sense is highly becoming him as the supreme Governor of the World, and a contrary Conduct wou'd be unbecoming his Character. Not that he does this meerly out of a Regard to the *Opinion of others*, or a *Love of Fame and Glory* (as this Gentleman thinks fit to represent it) but the Excellency of his own Nature, which is an eternal and indispensable Law to him, always carries him to do what is worthy of him, and most becoming his glorious Greatness, his infinite Purity, his governing Wisdom and Justice as well as Goodness.

But what Reason does this Author give, why *God cannot want any Satisfaction or Reparation of Honour*; that is, in other Words, why he must not take any Methods to vindicate his own Authority and Government, and maintain the Majesty of his Laws? The Reason is in short this, because no Sin can be an Injury to him; but if God is to be consider'd as the supreme

ſupreme Governor of the World, then as Governor of the World he is injur'd, when his Authority is contemned and his Laws violated.

But let us conſider more particularly what this Gentleman offers on this Head. He tells us, that "as God can never be injur'd, he can "never want Reparation." That "he who "is infinitely ſatisfied in himſelf, can gain no "Addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures "obſerving his Laws; nor can he, by their "not obſerving them, be reduc'd to a Condi-"tion of wanting Satisfaction or Reparation "of Honour, or any of thoſe Things which "depending on the Opinion of others are main "Ingredients of human Happineſs, p. 38." And again, that "God can neither be made "angry, provok'd, nor griev'd by the Con-"duct of us wretched Mortals, for then he "cou'd not enjoy a Moment's Quiet; nor "has he any Comfort or Satisfaction to gain "from the Thoughts and Actions of his Crea-"tures; for then he wou'd never be without "an Infinity of them jointly contributing to "that End, p. 39.

It will eaſily be granted that God cannot receive any Addition to his eſſential Felicity by the Services or good Actions of his Creatures, nor ſuffer any Diminution of it by their Sins; that is, nothing that his Creatures can do for or againſt him can render him more or leſs perfect than he always is, becauſe he is always in himſelf infinitely perfect, and therefore is always in himſelf infinitely happy. And this is all that is intended in the Paſſage produc'd by the Author

Author out of the Book of *Job*, Chap. 35. 6, 7, 8. the Design of which is plainly to shew that the Creatures cannot bring God under any Obligation by any thing they are capable of doing, as if he really needed their Services, as we do the good Offices of our Fellow-Creatures, and cou'd not be happy without them. But tho' he is infinitely happy in himself and in his own glorious incomparable Perfections, yet under this Pretence to represent him as not concerning himself with Mankind, as having no Complacency in their good Actions, nor displeas'd and offended with their evil ones, wou'd be under Pretence of magnifying the divine Happiness to strike at all Religion. This was the old *Epicurean* Scheme, *nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira*; which was design'd to destroy a Providence. If God beholds the good and evil Actions of his Creatures, either he is pleas'd with the one, and displeas'd with the other, or he regards them both alike; and then it must be said, either that there is no real Difference between them, which is to confound the Reasons of Things, and to destroy all Difference between Virtue and Vice, or that God does not judge of Things as they really are. This Gentleman himself frequently talks of what is pleasing or displeasing to God in the Actions of his Creatures (as I shall shew afterwards) which is in effect to say the same thing that here he finds fault with. If he says it is not on his own Account, but for the Benefit or Hurt accruing from thence to his Creatures, that he is

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pleas'd or displeas'd; yet still if the good Actions of his Creatures be pleasing to him at all on whatever Account, it must be said that he is pleas'd with them, or which is the same thing takes a Complacency in them, and if their evil Actions be displeasing to him on whatever Account, still it must be said that he is displeas'd with them, which yet he seems here to represent as inconsistent with the essential Happiness of the divine Nature.

If there be a God at all he cannot but take a divine Delight and Complacency in whatever is just and fit, in the Order and moral Beauty of Things, in what is *fair and shapely and amiable, apart from the deform'd, the foul, the odious*, to use Lord *Shaftsbury*'s Expressions. This is founded in the infinite Perfection and Rectitude and Goodness of his own Mind. How then can we possibly conceive of him otherwise, but that he must take a Complacency and Satisfaction in beholding his Creatures acting up to the Dignity of their Natures, and doing what is fit and reasonable for them to do towards him and towards one another?

But is not this to suppose (according to our Author) that he has *an Addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws*, and that he *has Comfort and Satisfaction to gain* from their *Thoughts* and *Actions*? it is indeed certain that God can receive no Accession to his essential Felicity; and therefore it seems not very proper to talk of his gaining an Addition of Satisfaction; but we must not under this Pretence deny a Thing which is evident

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to the common Reason of Mankind, and that is, that God has a Complacency in the good Dispositions and Actions of his Creatures; and yet this is, according to our Manner of Conception, something distinct from the Complacency that arises properly and immediately from his own infinite Excellencies. The Author's way of arguing wou'd be as good to prove that God takes no Delight in the Happiness of his Creatures, as that he has no Satisfaction in their Services; and yet it is scarce possible for us to conceive the Goodness of God as taking no Complacency in his Creatures Happiness; and for any under Pretence of asserting that he is infinitely happy in himself to say he is indifferent to the Happiness or Misery of his Creatures, equally affected to the one and the other, wou'd be to make a strange Representation of the divine Nature; and yet it might be said, if God delight in their Happiness, is not this to suppose that he has an Addition of Satisfaction from the Happiness of his Creatures? indeed it is very easy for us when we are speaking of the divine Nature to run into such Difficulties as these, which are owing to the Incomprehensibleness of the Subject, and the Narrowness of our own Understandings.

Our Author urges, "If God cou'd have any "Satisfaction to gain from the Thoughts and "Actions of his Creatures, he wou'd never be "without an Infinity of them jointly contri- "buting to this End." But this way of arguing may be easily turn'd upon himself. He supposes that it was the Goodness of God that

prompted him to make Creatures, that he might communicate Happineſs to them; and might it not be ſaid, that if ſo, ſince he was equally good from all Eternity, he wou'd never be without an infinite Number of Creatures to whom he might communicate Happineſs? Whatever Anſwer he gives to this, will equally ſerve the other. Indeed God's making Creatures at ſuch a Time muſt be reſolv'd wholly into his moſt wiſe Counſels, of which we are not the proper Judges, and for which we may be ſure he had good Reaſons, tho' we don't know them.

Whatever Reaſons prove that God cannot but take a Complacency in what is morally good and fit, beautiful and regular, do equally prove that he cannot but be diſpleas'd (though he cannot, ſtrictly ſpeaking, be griev'd) with what is contrary to it, and therefore with the Sins of his Creatures. And if he be diſpleas'd with them, he will manifeſt that Diſpleaſure in that way and manner that ſeems moſt fit to his infinite Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs, and that becomes him as the moſt wiſe and juſt Governor of the World.

But ſays this Author, "No Man breaks "the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Ma- "ker, or imagines he can do God an Injury, p. 38. Thus this great Reformer of Mankind, all whoſe Religion is Morality, ſhews his Zeal for the Cauſe of Virtue by making an Apology for Sin; he does what he can to cauſe Men to entertain ſlight Thoughts of the Evil of Sin, a Thing which Men are too apt to do of themſelves,

ſelves, and don't need this Author to inſtruct them in. Is this the Service he does to Mankind, inſtead of creating an Abhorrence of Vice and Sin, to do all that lies in his Power to palliate the Malignity of it?

He ſays, *No Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Maker.* But if Men believe that God gave them Laws, requiring ſuch a Conduct from them, and yet go on in a contrary Conduct, neglecting what he commands, and committing what he forbids; if for ſome private ſorry Intereſts of their own, or for the Gratification of ſome baſe Appetite, they violate what they know to be the Laws of their Maker, is not this ſhewing a Contempt of thoſe Laws, and is not a Contempt of thoſe Laws a Contempt of him that gave them, and a deſpiſing his Authority? Is it not a prefering their own Wills and Appetites to his moſt wiſe and righteous Will, and an arraigning his Wiſdom or his Goodneſs? Is it not a Contempt of him, to act as if he had no Authority over us, or as if it were an indifferent or ſmall Matter whether his Laws were obſerv'd or not? Is it not a Contempt of him, to act as if we neither valued his Favour, nor fear'd his Diſpleaſure? Nor wou'd it at all mend the Matter, though in Words we profeſs'd the greateſt Veneration for him; for to profeſs a great Regard for him, and at the ſame Time to have no Regard at all to what he requires, wou'd only be to add Mockery to Diſobedience.

It is nothing to the Purpoſe whether Sin can do God any real Hurt. If it do not, no Thanks

to the Sinner; for the natural Tendency of Sin is to make God unhappy, if he were capable of being ſo; it is a ſtriking at his Authority and Laws, and if it cannot hurt his Being, it is owing to the infinite Perfection of his Nature. It is a ſtrange Way the Author takes to diminiſh the Evil of Sin, under Pretence of exalted Thoughts of the infinite Perfection of that God, againſt whom it is committed, and whoſe Laws are violated. The only Reaſon why Sin cannot really hurt him, is becauſe of the tranſcendent Excellency of his Nature; and ſhall this be a Reaſon why his Authority may be ſafely contemned, and his Laws tranſgreſs'd with Impunity? That very Perfection of his Nature, which makes it impoſſible for his Creatures to hurt him by their Sins, does alſo increaſe the Malignity of their Offences againſt him, and makes it impoſſible for him not to hate Sin, which is the moſt monſtrous Breach of all the Rules of Order. And if he hates Sin, this will carry him to do all that is proper for him as a moral Governor to hinder it, and ſhew his Diſpleaſure againſt it; and that is by threatning awful Puniſhments to the Violators of his Laws. And if it be juſt and neceſſary, as it is on many Accounts, to threaten thoſe Puniſhments, then his own Authority and Majeſty, the Declaration of his Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, as well as the deterring others from offending, requires that thoſe Threatnings ſhou'd be ordinarily executed, and that they ſhou'd not be diſpens'd with but upon Terms conſiſtent with the great Ends of his Government, and with the Authority of his Laws.

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What can be more worthy of God, than to let all the World see how sacred and inviolable are the Rights of his Government, and what a horrid Thing it is, and how displeasing to him, for a Creature to rise up against the Author of its Being, the Sovereign Lord, and Supreme Good? Besides, that this is highly fit and reasonable in it self, it is evident that the Peace, the Order, and Harmony of the moral World very much depends upon preserving a due Reverence for God in the Minds of his Creatures, and keeping up the Authority and Dignity of his Laws. As in the natural World, if God's sustaining Influence was substracted, the Order of Things wou'd soon be dissolv'd, and the Frame of Nature confounded; so it is a Regard to the Deity, his Authority and Laws, which maintains a just Order in the moral World, and without which it cou'd not long subsist. It is therefore of the highest Importance, that the Authority of God, and the Majesty of his Law and Dominion, be kept sacred and inviolate, and that the profoundest Reverence of his supreme Authority, and Fear of offending him, and consequently a Horror of Sin, and a deep and lively Sense of its hainous Malignity and Demerit, be maintain'd in the World. And whosoever attempts to diminish the Horror of Sin, and Men's Reverence for the divine Authority, and to teach Men to look upon the Transgression of the divine Law as a slight Thing, and no more than the Offence of one Creature against another, seems to me to strike at all Order at once. It is an Attempt to ba-

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niſh a Regard for the Deity, the Fear of God from amongſt Men, and to diſſolve the original Bonds that keep up the Order and Harmony of the moral World.

This ſeems to me to be the manifeſt Tendency of this Gentleman's Scheme. He will not allow that God puniſhes thoſe *who violate his Laws as for an Injury done to himſelf, diſtinct from the Harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures*; I ask therefore does all the Malignity of Sin conſiſt wholly in the Harm it does to the Creatures? does it derive no Malignity at all from its being a Tranſgreſſion of the divine Law, and a Contempt of the divine Authority? if not, is not this to ſay there is no ſuch thing as a Sin againſt God at all? nor ought Sinners ever to acknowledge and confeſs that they have ſinned againſt God, or be at all concerned on this Account. And ſo the Author has found out an admirable Expedient to make Perſons eaſy in their Crimes, by telling them that they need not be concern'd; there is no ſuch thing as a Creature's ſinning againſt God, and if there be no ſuch thing, then certainly they need not fear being puniſh'd for it. But if there be no Sins againſt God, this is to deny that there are any Duties owing to God, which is in effect to deny that there is a God that governs the World. So that we ſee where this fine Scheme ends at laſt. For if there be a God that governs the World and has given us Laws, then there are Duties we properly owe him, and to tranſgreſs the Laws he has given, is truly and properly to ſin againſt God;

God; and if it be a vile and monstrous Thing, as it manifestly is, for his reasonable Creatures to oppose their Wills to the Supreme, to resist his Authority, and to refuse to be govern'd by his Laws, then certainly a just and righteous God who judges of Things as they are will regard it in this View, and will consequently punish it in this View and under this Consideration, and therefore will punish Sin not meerly as a Harm done to the Creatures, but as a most unjust and ungrateful Opposition to his own Government and Laws, and an Indignity offer'd to his supreme Authority.

When therefore this Author asserts that *upon his own Account God can't be in the least affected whether his Laws be observ'd or not*, p. 38. if his Meaning be (as it seems to be his Intention) that God has no Regard at all in this Matter to the Dignity of his own Authority and Government, it is false. It may be said that *on his own Account*, that is, on Account of the transcendent Excellency of his own Nature, he will do whatever is fit and proper for him to do, as the wise and righteous Governor of the World, and whatever becomes his own glorious Excellency, his Wisdom and Righteousness as well as Goodness. This Gentleman himself owns, that that "Justice where-"by God is righteous in all his Actions, is e-"ternally inherent in the divine Nature, p. 41. that "the Happiness of God consists in his "Rectitude, and in his acting according to the "all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind, p. 23. "that cou'd we suppose him to act o-

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"therwise (than as his own Reason directs, and than according to the Purity and Rectitude of his own Nature) "he wou'd be as unhappy "as now he is happy, p. 23, 25. that it is a "Contradiction to his Nature to do any thing "that is not fit and reasonable, p. 26." And is there any thing more fit and reasonable, or to use the Author's Phrase, more conformable to the Nature and Reason of Things, than that an infinitely perfect and righteous Being shou'd love Righteousness and hate all Iniquity; or that the most wise Governor of the World when he has given Laws to his Creatures for the Rule of their Conduct shou'd vindicate the Authority of those Laws, and not suffer them to be trampled upon with Impunity? and when his reasonable Creatures rise up in opposition to his Authority shou'd testify his Displeasure against such a Conduct? if on all these Accounts to punish Sin and manifest his Displeasure against it be to act in Conformity to the Fitness of Things, to the Rectitude of his own Nature, and to the Reason of his own all-comprehending Mind, then by the Author's own Definition of the divine Happiness, his own Happiness will ingage him to do so; and tho' Sin cannot hurt him or make him miserable, yet since (as he owns) to act contrary to his own Reason and Rectitude, wou'd make him so; it follows that if his own infinite Wisdom and Righteousness sees it proper for him to punish Sin and manifest his Displeasure against it, not to do this wou'd be acting contrary to the Reason of his own Mind, to his own Purity

ty and Rectitude, and consequently would be contrary to his Happiness.

'Tis true he *takes no Pleasure in Punishment as such* (that is, meerly as it makes any Creature miserable) and in this respect it may be said, that he *cannot have any thing he hath made*, as this Author speaks, p. 42. yet he may take a Complacency in punishing Sin, as it is acting according to the steddy eternal Rules of Righteousness, which is of far greater Importance and more to be consider'd than the private Benefit of any Creature; nor must he for the sake of any Creature or Creatures do an unwise an unfit and unbecoming Thing, unsuitable to his own Perfection and Wisdom. The great Ends of Government are a much greater Good than the Criminal's Ease or Exemption from deserved Punishment, and therefore preferred by infinite Wisdom. Notwithstanding he delights not in the Punishment of Sinners, as tending to make them miserable, yet he delights in it as it is a Vindication of his own sacred Rights, as it tends to the Preservation of Order, and the Authority of his Laws, and therefore is most becoming his excellent Greatness and Wisdom and Purity; in a word, as it is acting worthy of himself, which can't but yield Complacency and Delight to the best of Beings. And in this Sense those Scriptures are to be understood, which represent God as delighting in executing his just Vengeance, and satisfying himself in the Punishment of Sinners.

Our Author frequently represents the sacred Writings, as ascribing the worst Passions of the

human Nature to God. This he often repeats, particularly in his 13th Chapter, where he ſaith, "that many Texts do in the plaineſt Manner "aſcribe human Paſſions, even of the worſt "Kind, to God;" and asks, "what Noti-"ons muſt the Vulgar have of God, if the "Light of Nature can't direct them right, when "they find he is ſaid to be jealous and furious? ſee p. 251. And again, p. 205. that "the "Scripture, taken literally, gives the Vulgar "falſe and unworthy Notions of the divine "Nature, by imputing almoſt every where to "God—even the worſt of human Paſſions." He here evidently refers to thoſe Paſſages of Scripture that expreſs his Reſentment againſt Sinners, and Reſolution to puniſh them, and the Effects of his Juſtice, under the Epithets of Wrath, Fury, *&c.* And he repreſents the *common Syſtems of Divinity* (that is, thoſe that talk of God's puniſhing Sin out of a Regard to the Dignity of his Laws and Government, *&c.*) as repreſenting God *full of Wrath and Fury, ready to glut himſelf with Revenge for the Injuries he has ſuffer'd by the Breach of his Laws*, p. 40. as *cloathing him with the worſt of our Infirmities*, and repreſenting him as *an ambitious, ſuſpicious, wrathful, and revengeful Being*, p. 39. and again, as *hating the Creatures he hath made*, or as *ſubject to ſuch Weakneſs or Impotence, as to act arbitrarily, or out of Spite, Wrath, Revenge, or Self-intereſt*, p 42.

It is very eaſy to heap up ſuch Expreſſions as theſe, which are deſign'd no doubt to expoſe his

his Adversaries; but which really only shew the Injustice of this Author, and the strange Liberties he allows himself in misrepresenting the Sense of those whom he thinks fit to oppose. At this rate it is but bestowing a hard Name upon them, and the most glorious Actions shall pass for Crimes. It is but calling Justice Spite and Revenge, and that which is one of the noblest of Virtues shall be the most odious of Vices.

This Gentleman saith, that to ascribe Anger, Revenge, and such like Passions to God, wou'd be *to make him resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent Part of our Nature, rather than the manly, noble, and generous*, p. 39. But was a just and steddy Detestation of Evil and Wickedness ever accounted a Weakness or Imperfection in any Man? Or rather has not an easy Softness and Indulgence, a giving way to the Movements of Compassion, even where Justice and the Order of Things requires that the Offender shou'd be punish'd, has not this been always accounted weak and womanish? A fixed Displeasure against all Vice and Wickedness which is inseparable from true Virtue and a Love of Goodness, is certainly one of the noblest Characters. This, if any thing, may be call'd manly, noble and generous. Is not this that which the wisest Heathens so much admir'd in *Cato*'s Character? And what wou'd they have thought of any Person that shou'd have represented him on this very Account, as weak, womanish, suspicious, and revengeful? And what then can we think of a Man

that chuſes to repreſent that ſteddy Rectitude, that Love of Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, which carries the moſt wiſe and righteous Governor of the World to manifeſt his Diſpleaſure againſt Wickedneſs by puniſhing it, under this mean and unworthy Notion?

I muſt confeſs it has always ſeem'd to me one great Excellency of the ſacred Writings, that they tend to give Men the moſt ſtrong and lively Impreſſions of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, and of God's righteous Diſpleaſure againſt it, and conſequently to inſpire them with the utmoſt Horror of Vice and Wickedneſs, and with a Dread of the divine Juſtice, which will certainly purſue them in a terrible Manner, if they perſiſt in an obſtinate Courſe of Wickedneſs. It is proper that in a Revelation deſign'd to recover Men from thoſe evil Courſes to which they are ſo ſtrongly addicted, theſe Things ſhou'd be repreſented in the moſt ſtrong and ardent Expreſſions; no weak, ſoft, languid Repreſentations wou'd be ſufficient; and therefore the Scriptures make uſe of the ſtrongeſt Expreſſions that Language affords, ſuch as thoſe of *Wrath*, and *Fury*, to deſcribe God's great Diſpleaſure againſt Sin, and Reſolution to puniſh it, and the terrible Effects of his Juſtice. Such Repreſentations are admirably fitted to awaken preſumptuous Sinners out of their ſtupid Security, to a quick and lively Senſe of their Guilt and Danger, which is the firſt Step to ſerious Conſideration and Amendment; and then the ſame Scriptures do alſo make the moſt amiable Diſcoveries of his infinite Love and

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Goodneſs, and of his rich Grace and Mercy to penitent returning Sinners, to ingage and encourage them to return, and to work upon the more ingenuous Principles and Diſpoſitions of the human Nature. Nor is there any Danger that any that diligently read and conſider the Holy Scriptures, ſhou'd interpret thoſe other Paſſages as ſignifying the ſudden Emotions of raſh Anger or bitter Reſentment, ſuch as are to be found in hot and paſſionate or revengeful Men, ſince there are many other Paſſages in the ſacred Writings that by the exalted Notions they give us of the Deity, of his Immutability, Patience, Long-ſuffering, ſufficiently ſecure us againſt ſuch Miſapprehenſions. Do not the ſame Scriptures repreſent God as declaring, and that with the greateſt Solemnity, that he *delights not in the Death of Sinners, but rather that they ſhould turn and live*, and as uſing the propereſt Methods to ingage them to return? So that none that govern themſelves by the ſacred Writings, and carefully compare one Paſſage with another, and take their Notions from thence, can think that thoſe Expreſſions of *Wrath* and *Fury* ſignify a paſſionate fierce Reſentment and Hatred againſt the Perſons of Sinners abſolutely conſider'd, but a pure and righteous Deteſtation of Sin and Wickedneſs, and a ſteddy Reſolution to puniſh it.

And 'tis certain, that if Sinners do not conceive of God as diſpleas'd with them when they ſin, and do not fear his Diſpleaſure on that Account, there is an End of all Religion. And if any Man, under Pretence of repreſenting God

God infinitely happy in himſelf, ſhou'd repreſent him as unconcern'd at the Actions of his Creatures, taking no Complacency in their good Actions, nor diſpleas'd with their evil Ones, this wou'd be under Pretence of doing God Honour to deſtroy his Providence and Government of the World, and to take away the Differences of Good and Evil; and if this was the Repreſentation the Scriptures gave us of this Matter, it wou'd be to me an inſuperable Objection againſt them.

But I can't help obſerving, that this Writer (with whom it is a familiar Thing to contradict in one Paſſage what he advances in another) does himſelf frequently fall into that manner of Expreſſion which he here finds ſo much fault with. He often talks of what is pleaſing and diſpleaſing to the Deity. Thus he tells us, that "we are to meaſure what is pleaſing and "diſpleaſing to God (which takes in the whole "of Religion) from what our Reaſon teaches "concerning his Nature, p. 30. p. 66." where he plainly falls into the Notion he endeavours to ridicule, of God's having a Satisfaction or Complacency in the good Actions of his Creatures, and being diſpleas'd with their evil ones, and ſuppoſes that this may be gather'd from what our Reaſon teaches us concerning his Nature.

To the ſame purpoſe he ſaith, that "if do-"ing Evil be the only Foundation of God's "Diſpleaſure, then ceaſing to do Evil muſt "take away that Diſpleaſure; and that as long "as Men continue in their Sins, they muſt "con-

" continue the proper Objects of God's Re-
" ſentment, but when they forſake their Sins,
" they of courſe become the proper Objects
" of his Approbation, p. 417, 418." Here he plainly ſuppoſes that the doing Evil is a juſt *Foundation for God's Diſpleaſure*; and affirms that as long as Men continue in their Sins, they muſt continue *the proper Objects of his Reſentment*. He aſcribes *Diſpleaſure* and *Reſentment* to God, and that this Diſpleaſure and Reſentment is excited by the Sins of Men.

And p. 280. where he endeavours to ſhew how eaſily the common People may know the Duties they owe to God, he ſaith, " they
" need not much Reflection to know, that the
" higheſt Honour and Worſhip they can ren-
" der to God is ſolemnly to own him to be
" what he is; and that as they cannot but ſee,
" it wou'd be in them affronting God to offer
" him a Worſhip which they believe he ab-
" hors; ſo they muſt think the ſame in others. Here the Author allows it as a Thing ſo clear that the meaneſt of the People can't be ignorant of it, that there may be a *Worſhip which God abhors*, and that to offer him ſuch a Worſhip is to *affront* him. He ſuppoſes this to be the Sentiment that common Senſe inſpires into all Mankind, and which there needs but little Reflection to diſcern. And are not theſe Expreſſions which this Gentleman uſes, of God's being *affronted*, of his *Reſentment* of Evil, his *Diſpleaſure*, his *Abhorrence*, as ſtrong and obnoxious as thoſe he finds fault with in the ſacred

cred Writings? if this be the Law of Nature, why shou'd the Scriptures be charg'd as conveying to us Notions contrary to that Law, meerly because they describe God's Resentment against Sin in a strong Manner?

There is another Passage I wou'd mention on this Occasion. The Author when finding fault with our Saviour's Precept of loving our Enemies, tells us, "that Actions abstractedly "consider'd, are not the Objects of Love and "Hate, but Persons for the Sake of their "Actions; and that the Actions of some "Men are too detestable to create in us any "Sentiment, but of Aversion, so as to oblige "us to bring them to condign Punishment, p. 342. Here he supposes that it wou'd be quite wrong, it wou'd be in it self a Vice, and argue an ill Temper of Mind, not to have a Detestation for some Actions and an Aversion for the Persons that commit them, or not to punish them on the Account of them. And therefore God who infinitely exceeds all Men in Righteousness and Purity, must have proportionably a greater Detestation for those Actions, and consequently by this Author's way of reasoning, a greater Aversion to the Persons that commit them, and be more strongly inclin'd by the Perfection of his Nature *to bring them to condign Punishment*. And since in the Passage just now cited this Gentleman supposes it to be evident to the common Reason of Mankind, that there is a Worship which God *abhors*, and that to offer that Worship to him is to *affront* him, or offer an Indignity to his glo-

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rious Majesty, then if *Actions abstractedly consider'd are not the Objects of Love and Hate*, (as he argues) *but Persons for the sake of their Actions*, those that offer to God this Worship which he abhors, must (according to this Author) themselves be the Objects of his Abhorrence. And now how will this Writer clear himself from holding, that *God hates the Creatures he hath made*, and acts out of *Spite*, *Wrath*, *Revenge*, or *Self-interest*? p. 42. Whatever he saith to clear himself from this Charge, will equally justify the Expressions us'd in the sacred Writings.

As to the Author's Maxim, which is the Title of his 4th Chapter, that "all the Penalties "annex'd to the divine Laws are for the Good "of Mankind, even of those who suffer for "the Breach of 'em." And again, that "in "all the Punishments he inflicts, God must "act purely for the Good of his Creatures; "and the Effects of his Justice (they never "extending to Annihilation) must not only "be for the Good of others, but even of the "Persons punish'd, p. 41." It must be consider'd, that though God cannot, in making Creatures or giving them Laws, have in view the adding to his own essential Happiness, or making himself more perfect and happy than he is, yet there is a Justice which he owes to himself (and which his own infinite Perfection and therefore his Happiness requires) to act always wisely and righteously, in a Manner agreeable to the just Order and Reason of Things, and to his own glorious Perfections. And there-

fore both in making and executing his Laws, he conſiders not meerly what is for the Benefit of his Creatures, but what is moſt worthy of himſelf, and moſt agreeable to his own infinite Righteouſneſs, his Wiſdom, his Purity, as well as Goodneſs, in a word, to the tranſcendent Excellency of his own moſt perfect Nature, which is an eternal and indiſpenſable Law to him, which he can no more act contrary unto than he can deny himſelf. But ſuppoſing it to be purely for the Good of his Creatures that he inflicts Puniſhments, yet ſtill it muſt be for the general Good; and the Good of particular Perſons is no further to be conſider'd, than is conſiſtent with the general Good or Good of the Whole. Does not this Writer himſelf ſay, in that very Page where he advances the above Maxim, p. 41. "That when the Magiſtrate "puniſhes a Criminal, 'tis an Act of Juſtice "to the Publick; and when he pardons him, "'tis an Act of Mercy to the Criminal though "an Act of Injuſtice to the Publick." Why ſhou'd he therefore ſuppoſe, that in the divine Government Mercy muſt be ſhewn to every particular Perſon that offends? May it not be juſtly ſuppos'd, that in many Caſes a ſhewing Mercy to the Sinner may be an Injury to the Publick, inconſiſtent with the univerſal Good, to which the private Benefit or Intereſt of any particular Perſon or Perſons muſt give way? The only Argument he produces for it is this, "that God, whoſe Love infinitely "exceeds that of mortal Parents, chaſtiſes his "Children (and all Mankind are alike his Chil-

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" dren) becauſe he loves them, and deſigns " their Amendment, p. 42." But we muſt not think the Love of God towards his Creatures like Inſtinct, a weak partial Fondneſs to 'em becauſe they are his Productions. He indeed gave them Being, he made them, but then he made them reaſonable Creatures, moral Agents, and deſign'd to deal with them as ſuch, that is, to govern them by Laws, and to deal with them according to thoſe Laws. It does not follow that becauſe he gave them Being, he muſt reſolve to make them happy at any rate, but in ſuch a Method as is agreeable to the Nature of moral Agents, and to the wiſe and righteous Methods of his Government. He is their King as well as Father, and Fondneſs to his Children muſt not make him do what is unfit and improper for him as the great Governor of the World, and unbecoming his infinite Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs. Even among Men, if we ſuppoſe the ſame Perſon a Father and a Magiſtrate, he ought in many Caſes to puniſh his own Son, if tranſgreſſing the Laws. And if it cou'd be ſuppos'd that a King was the natural Father of all his Subjects, this wou'd not render it the leſs fit for him to puniſh them if they violated the Laws. If it were fit for him on ſuch a Suppoſition (as it undoubtedly wou'd) to make Laws, and to annex Penalties to thoſe Laws, it wou'd be alſo fit and neceſſary for him to execute them; and in that Caſe the puniſhing in an exemplary manner ſome rebellious contumacious Children, wou'd be a Kindneſs to the whole Nation or Family in general; and to refuſe to

puniſh them becauſe they were his Children, wou'd be a weak partial Conduct unbecoming a wiſe and juſt Governor.

Our Author concludes his 4th Chapter with a Hint againſt the Eternity of Hell Torments; his Reaſons are, becauſe "there can be no "Proportion between the temporary Injury "done to all Men, and eternal Miſery of but "one Man;" and becauſe "everlaſting Tor-"ment cannot work Amendment, p. 42." The firſt goes upon the Suppoſition, that all Sins are only to be regarded as Injuries done by one Creature to another, and not as Offences againſt God; a Suppoſition which has already been ſhewn to be falſe and abſurd; and what the Malignity and Demerit may be of a reaſonable Creature's obſtinate perſiſting in a preſumptuous Courſe of Diſobedience to the known Laws of the Creator, in Oppoſition to the ſupreme Authority, and to infinite Goodneſs, and conſequently what Puniſhment it may be fit and congruous for the righteous Governor of of the World to inflict, we are very improper Judges. Sinners may eaſily be partial in their own Cauſe, and judge by their own private Benefit, and not by the ſteddy eternal Rules of Righteouſneſs, and by a Regard to the univerſal Good, what it is that the Wiſdom and Juſtice of the Supreme Being may render it proper for him to do. There are few Penalties but what will be thought too ſevere, if the Criminal muſt be the Judge. The Scriptures that tell us, that *the Wicked ſhall go away into everlaſting Puniſhment*, do alſo frequent-

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ly intimate, that the Degrees of Punishment in a future State shall be very various, and that there shall be a vast Difference made between the Punishment of some and of others, according to the different Nature and Aggravations of their Crime.

As to what he adds, that *eternal Torment cannot work Amendment*, this goes upon the Supposition, that Punishment is only design'd for the Benefit and Amendment of the particular Person or Persons that are punish'd, which is a great Mistake, as has been already shewn. But though *eternal Torment* cannot tend to the private Benefit of the particular Persons that are punish'd, yet how does this Gentleman know but the punishing particular Sinners with everlasting Punishment may be for the general Good, or Good of the Whole, and may be what the just Order of Things, and the wise Ends of the divine Government may require? In which Case, out of Compassion to those particular Offenders, to abstain even from their everlasting Punishment wou'd be only a partial Tenderness. Far from being a Perfection, it wou'd be a Weakness, not to be suppos'd in the wise and righteous Governor of the World, who governs not by Motions of Passion, but by the steddy Rules of infinite Wisdom and Justice, and by a Regard to the Good, the Order, the Felicity of the whole System of rational Beings. The Threatnings even of everlasting Punishments are plainly for the publick Good; the original Design of these, and of all Threatnings, is not to procure the Misery of the Crea-

Creatures, but to prevent a Breach of the Law; and by deterring Perſons from tranſgreſſing the Law to prevent their Miſery. And as the threatning or denouncing Puniſhments againſt obſtinate Offenders is what Wiſdom and even Goodneſs or Mercy to the Whole as well as Juſtice requires, ſo when they are once threatned, Juſtice and Truth and rectoral Wiſdom, and even a Regard to the publick Order and Welfare, make it neceſſary that they ſhou'd be ordinarily executed. For better it were not to threaten thoſe Puniſhments, than to threaten them and yet never inflict them. We ſhou'd conceive a very odd Notion of any earthly Government that ſhou'd take this Method; and to ſuppoſe any thing like this in the divine Government, wou'd be to give a ſtrange Idea of the Righteouſneſs and Truth, the Wiſdom and Juſtice of the ſupreme Legiſlator.

Suppoſing reaſonable Creatures that by the original Conſtitution of their Being, are deſign'd for an immortal Duration, any thing leſs than an eternal Puniſhment wou'd ſcarce be ſufficient to deter them. To threaten obſtinate Offenders that are to live for ever only with a temporary Puniſhment, wou'd be as if in human Governments the higheſt Puniſhments denounc'd againſt the greateſt Offenders were only that they ſhou'd be confin'd for a few Hours, and then be enlarg'd; for any temporary Puniſhment whatſoever wou'd bear a leſs Proportion to the eternal Duration of the Sinner, than the Puniſhment of a few Hours wou'd to the Duration of the longeſt Life on Earth.

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This Gentleman elsewhere puts a Question into the Mouth of the *Indians*, " why is not " the Devil put under Confinement that he " may be prevented from doing Mischief? see p. 388. He seems to look upon this to be a very reasonable Question. Supposing therefore that it is the very Law of his Nature, to live for ever, to continue in immortal Being, wou'd not the Reason equally hold, that he shou'd be eternally in Confinement, that is, eternally kept in a State of Punishment, supposing him to continue eternally wicked; and why shou'd it not be equally just with respect to obstinate Sinners of the human Race, that they shou'd be eternally confin'd in a State of Punishment, supposing them to continue eternally wicked? This Author indeed says, that " infinite Wil- " dom knows how to adjust the Punishment " to the Offence, that it may be exactly fit- " ted to produce the desir'd Amendment, p. 42. But the Question is not, what it is possible for God to do by his absolute Power; he cou'd by his Power have prevented their sinning at all, and have made them absolutely impeccable; but he has not done so; he has thought proper to leave them to the free Exercise of their reasonable Natures; and if he shou'd still leave them to themselves, it is probable that where they are confirm'd in impure and vicious Habits, they will still continue thus wicked, notwithstanding their Punishment; and that the longer they continue, the more hardned they will grow, (instances of which we may observe daily) except God shou'd interpose in a very extra-

extraordinary Manner in their Favour, to change the Diſpoſitions of their Minds; and who can pretend to ſay that God is oblig'd to do this, or that it is wiſe and fit for him to do ſo? may it not be proper in this Caſe to leave them under thoſe Puniſhments they have by their own wilful Diſobedience and Obſtinacy brought upon themſelves? perhaps if inlarg'd and freed from the Weight of Puniſhment, they wou'd only (ſuppoſing them confirm'd in Wickedneſs) make uſe of their Liberty to ſeduce others to Sin, and to do all the Miſchief in their Power. And it may be a Mercy to the Publick (taking in the whole Syſtem of rational Beings) to continue them in that State of Puniſhment.

No body counts it unjuſt in earthly Governments in many Caſes to inflict Penalties that ſhall laſt as long as the Lives of the Offenders; nor does it alter the Caſe let them live never ſo long; they may be continued in a State of perpetual Impriſonment, or hard Labour, to the End of their Lives; and if Men liv'd now as long as they did in the antediluvian World, a thouſand Years, it wou'd not render ſuch a Puniſhment unjuſt; it wou'd ſtill be thought neceſſary then as much as now to inflict Penalties that ſhou'd be equal to the Lives of the Offenders, or which they cou'd not expect to outlive; and who then can pretend to affirm that it is unjuſt in the ſupreme Governor of the Univerſe to inflict upon obſtinate Offenders a Puniſhment that ſhall be commenſurate to the Duration of their Beings,

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how long soever we may suppose them to continue? and tho' those particular Persons thus punish'd were never to be amended by it (which may very reasonably be suppos'd concerning Persons confirm'd in inveterate evil Habits) yet it might be of great Benefit as a Warning and Example to others, as well as a standing Declaration of God's impartial Justice and Righteousness, and the Authority of his Government and Laws, and to convince the whole World what an evil and bitter Thing it is for reasonable Creatures to revolt from the Authority and Laws of the Supreme. And as it may be justly suppos'd, that the whole Number of Persons thus punish'd will bear but a small Proportion to the intire System of rational Beings, this will no more be a Reflection on the infinite Goodness of God, than it wou'd be upon the Goodness of a wise Government on Earth, to have Jails or Work-houses for Criminals, where they are confin'd during Life, whilst vastly greater Numbers of peaceable and loyal Subjects are flourishing under the Protection and Influence of that Government, and of wise and equal Laws. And as to let those Criminals hardned in Wickedness out of Confinement in meer Compassion to them, and to suffer them to go abroad again to disturb the Peace and Order of Society, wou'd be an Injury to the Publick; so how do we know but that in the greater System, the letting loose obstinate Sinners and freeing them from their Punishment out of meer Pity to them, might be a Detriment to the Peace, the Order, and Welfare of the moral

World or universal Syſtem, and of the loyal obedient Part of the Creation?

As to the Paſſage this Author produces from Biſhop *Tillotſon*, viz. That "the Right that "God hath in his Creatures is founded in the "Benefits he hath conferr'd upon them, and "the Obligation they are under to him on that "Account. Now there's none who becauſe "he has done a Benefit, can have by virtue of "that a Right to do a greater Evil than the "Good he has done amounts to; and I think "it next to Madneſs to doubt, whether ex-"treme and eternal Miſery be not a greater "Evil than ſimple Being is a Good." This Argument is good to prove, that God, meerly by virtue of his Right as Creator, has not a Right to puniſh *innocent* Creatures everlaſtingly; but it does not prove that he has not a Right thus to puniſh guilty Creatures. For he does not puniſh them meerly by virtue of his Right as Creator for his own abſolute Will and Pleaſure, but he puniſhes them as he is the righteous Governor of the World. Among Men, though the Prince or Magiſtrate may have conferr'd no particular Benefits on a Perſon at all, this does not hinder his Right of puniſhing, if that Perſon have violated the Laws; nor is it any Injuſtice, though the Puniſhment inflicted be greater than any particular Benefit conferr'd by the Magiſtrate upon that Perſon; the Juſtice of the Puniſhment is to be meaſur'd by other Rules.

Before I leave this Subject, I ſhall take ſome Notice of this Author's Doctrine concerning the

the Nature of those Rewards and Punishments that God confers or inflicts upon those that observe or transgress his Laws, which he seems to think are nothing but the Satisfaction or Remorse that are the natural and necessary Consequences of good or evil Actions. He tells us, p. 25. that "herein appears the great Wisdom "of God, in making Men's Happiness and "Misery the necessary and inseparable Con-"sequence of their Actions; and that rational "Actions carry with them their own Reward, "and irrational their own Punishment. This, "I think, can't be denied, as long as there are "some Actions naturally beneficial to us, and "others as hurtful; and that there's no Vir-"tue, but what has some Good inseparably "annex'd to it; and no Vice, but what as ne-"cessarily carries with it some Evil; and if "our rational Nature is to be the same in the "next Life as it is in this, our Actions must "produce Effects of the same Kind, and that "too in a much higher Degree." And again, p. 26. "Though human Law-givers are forc'd "to have recourse to Punishments, which are "not connected with the Things they forbid; "yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus "straitned, but may make one the necessary "Consequence of the other; and indeed how "can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil "have their Foundation in the essential Diffe-"rence of Things, and their Nature is fix'd "and immoveable: And consequently our "Happiness depends on the intrinsick Nature "of the One, and our Misery on the intrin-

" ſick Nature of the other." Here he ſeems to me to deny any Rewards but what flow from the intrinſick Nature of Virtue, or any Puniſhments but what flow from the intrinſick Nature of Vice; and in a word, any Rewards or Puniſhments but what are the natural and neceſſary Conſequences of Men's Actions.

It will eaſily be allow'd, that a Courſe of good and virtuous Actions has a natural Tendency to produce an inward Satisfaction of Mind, and the contrary Courſe Diſſatisfaction and Remorſe; but to ſay (as this Author inſinuates) that no Reward ſhall attend the One, nor any Puniſhment attend the Other, but what by a natural and neceſſary Conſequence flows from the Actions themſelves, is to betray the Cauſe of Virtue under Pretence of magnifying it, and to give the greateſt Encouragement to Vice, under Pretence of repreſenting the Miſery that inſeparably attends it. If Sinners cou'd once be perſuaded that God, the righteous Governor of the World, will inflict no Penalty upon them, but what ariſes from the Reflexion of their own Minds, and what is included in the very Nature of the Vice they indulge, I am afraid this wou'd prove for the moſt part but a ſmall Diſcouragement. The greateſt Agonies that Sinners feel, the Terrors, the Furies, the Remorſe of Conſcience that haunt the Wicked, and of which many of the Heathens ſpeak in very lively Terms, do principally proceed from a ſecret Dread of a future Judgment, and of that divine Vengeance that awaits their Crimes; and to take away the Dread of future Puniſh-

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ment, wou'd be the moſt effectual Way to remove their Agonies of Mind, to allay thoſe Furies that torment them, and to make them eaſy in their Crimes, which this Author ſeems very ſollicitous to do. There are many ſo perverted, that they even take a Pleaſure in their Wickedneſs; and if the Remorſe naturally attending their Crimes were all the Puniſhment they were to endure, then the more they got above that Remorſe, (that is, the more obſtinate and hardned they were in ſinning) the more they wou'd be freed from the Puniſhment due to their Crimes; ſo that thoſe who had made the leaſt Progreſs in Vice and Wickedneſs, wou'd have the largeſt Share of Puniſhment. I believe every one will eaſily own, that if there were no Puniſhments for obſtinate Offenders in this Life, but that Remorſe that naturally flows from the Vices themſelves which they indulge, and from the Crimes which they commit, this wou'd prove but a ſmall Diſcouragement; nor cou'd any Government be ſafe, or the Peace and Order of any Society long preſerv'd, if there were no other Penalties.

But ſays our Author, "tho' human Law-"givers are forc'd to have Recourſe to Puniſh-"ments which are not connected" (*viz.* by a natural and neceſſary Connection) "with "the Things they forbid; yet a Being of in-"finite Power is not thus ſtraitned, but may "make one the neceſſary Conſequence of the "other." The Queſtion is not, what a Being of infinite Power can do? he cou'd have ſo order'd it that by an original Law ariſing from

from the very Conſtitution of our Natures, the Moment any Perſon ſinn'd or indulg'd any Vice he ſhou'd be invaded with all Manner of Pains or Miſeries, or ſhou'd that Moment die; in which Caſe it might have been ſaid that there was a natural Connexion between the one and the other. But he has not done ſo; nor indeed in this Caſe wou'd there have been any room for choice. He has thought proper to deal with us as reaſonable Creatures to be govern'd not meerly by preſent Senſe and what we now feel, but by the Hopes or Fears of Rewards and Puniſhments in a future State. He has not therefore annex'd to the very Performance of good and virtuous Actions ſuch a Reward as makes any other Reward unneceſſary, nor has he annex'd to the very Commiſſion of Sin and Vice ſuch a Puniſhment and Miſery as makes any further Puniſhment needleſs. For then there wou'd need no other Rewards or Puniſhments in human Governments no more than the divine, but what neceſſarily flow from the Actions themſelves; and the beſt way wou'd be to leave Men to themſelves and to the natural Effects of their own Crimes, without any other Penalties.

Our Author owns "that human Law-givers "are forc'd to have Recourſe to Puniſhments "which are not connected with the Things "they forbid;" but why are they *forc'd to have Recourſe to* ſuch additional *Puniſhments*? is it not becauſe the Remorſe and Miſery which this Gentleman ſuppoſes to be the natural and inſeparable Attendant of vicious Actions,

Actions, is not sufficient to deter Persons from their Crimes without further Penalties?

It is evident therefore that whatever we suppose a Being of infinite Power might do, yet he has not actually annex'd such a Degree of Misery to the very Commission of a vicious Action as renders any further Punishment unnecessary. But indeed after all his Talk of God's appointing those Rewards and Punishments which he supposes to be the inseparable Attendants of virtuous and vicious Actions, I don't see that he leaves God any thing to do in this Matter at all. For after having said that a Being of infinite Power may *make the Punishment* the *necessary Consequence* of the Crime, he adds, " and indeed how can it be " otherwise, since Good and Evil have their " Foundation in the essential Difference of " Things, and their Nature is fix'd and immo- " vable; and consequently our Happiness de- " pends on the intrinsick Nature of the one, " and our Misery on the intrinsick Nature of the " other?" where he seems to make the Happiness or Misery of Persons to arise intirely from the Nature of the Things themselves, independently on the divine Appointment; so that properly speaking God confers no Rewards, and inflicts no Punishments at all, but leaves Men only and wholly to the natural Effects of their own Actions. And thus under Pretence of ascribing more to God as a Being of infinite Power than to any earthly Governors, he allows him far less. They may inflict other Punishments and confer other Rewards besides what do natural-

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ly and neceſſarily ariſe from the Nature of the Actions themſelves, but God muſt not do it. But if it appears from Fact and Experience that the Miſery that naturally attends Vice is not alone ſufficient to deter Men from it, but that beſides this there need further Penalties, and therefore human Law-givers may inflict other Puniſhments, why may not God do it as well as they? and why ſhou'd Men be left meerly to the Effects of their own Crimes, and be ſubject to no other Puniſhment, in another Life any more than in this?

Let us hear how our Author accounts for it. "In this Life, ſays he, we can't be perfectly "happy, as ſubject to Diſeaſes and Diſaſters: "we are imperfect our ſelves, and have none "to converſe with but imperfect Creatures, "and yet if we act according to the Dictates "of right Reaſon, we ſhall receive even here, "true inward Comfort and Satisfaction; and "hereafter when we are freed from thoſe Im-"perfections, eternal Happineſs: on the con-"trary, the Man who abandons his Reaſon, "beſides the Miſery of all Sorts an irrational "Conduct will bring on him, muſt feel in his "Mind, Pain and Anguiſh even in this Life, "and in the Life to come, when there are no "ſenſual Things to divert his Thoughts, in-"ſupportable Grief and Miſery.

This is very true; but the Author here plainly gives up the Cauſe, and owns Rewards and Puniſhments, which are not the natural and inſeparable Conſequence of the Actions themſelves, even whilſt he endeavours to ſhew the con-

contrary. He ſuppoſes, that good Men in the Life to come ſhall have a perfect Freedom from *Diſeaſes and Diſaſters*, and from all the outward Evils and Inconveniences of this preſent State. And is not this a Reward diſtinct from their good Actions, and ſeparable in it's Nature from them? It does not neceſſarily flow from the intrinſick Nature of Virtue, but is an additional Encouragement given by the great Ruler of the World, that if they now apply themſelves to the Practice of Righteouſneſs, they ſhall hereafter be plac'd in a State of Perfection, where they ſhall be abſolutely freed from all thoſe Evils and Inconveniences to which they are now ſubject. Again he ſuppoſes, that wicked Men in the Life to come ſhall have *no ſenſual Things to divert their Thoughts*. Does not this ſuppoſe, that they ſhall be plac'd in a State where they ſhall be depriv'd of thoſe outward Comforts and Enjoyments that now yield them Pleaſure; that is, that they ſhall be in a Place like what the Scripture repreſents it, miſerable and diſmal, where no Light or Comfort dwells? For if they ſhou'd hereafter be plac'd in a World where they ſhall have the common Advantages and Conveniences they now enjoy, why may they not meet with *ſenſual Things to divert their Thoughts*, and yield them Entertainment there as well as here? Since therefore he ſuppoſes they ſhall there have *no ſenſual Things to divert their Thoughts*, he muſt ſuppoſe them plac'd by the great Ruler of the World in dark and diſmal Abodes, deſtitute of the Conveniences

ces and Comforts of Life, and of thoſe Things that wou'd entertain and gratify their Senſes, like Criminals that are confin'd in a Priſon or Dungeon. And wou'd not this be thought a grievous Puniſhment? Wou'd this be to leave them meerly to themſelves, and the natural Effects of their own Actions? Or wou'd it not be an additional Puniſhment and a great one too, beſides the Remorſe that neceſſarily flows from the Nature of the Crimes they commit? And I don't ſee, but ſuppoſing wicked Perſons to continue in their Wickedneſs to Eternity, (which may well be ſuppos'd if they continue in immortal Being, conſidering the Strength of their evil Habits) then by this Author's own Conceſſion, they muſt be eternally depriv'd of ſenſual Enjoyments, that is, they muſt be in an eternal diſmal Confinement, and eternally endure *inſupportable Grief and Miſery.*

And now I have conſider'd the Account the Author gives of the Law of Nature, with reſpect to the main Principles and Sanctions of that Law; or the Scheme of Religion he wou'd introduce; and I think it appears upon an impartial View, to be prejudicial to the Intereſts of natural Religion, which he pretends ſo highly to magnify and admire.

It tends to weaken Men's Regard to the Deity; and under Pretence of extolling the Goodneſs of God, does in effect ſubvert his Authority and Dominion. It makes it in effect indifferent whether there be any diſtinct Regard had to God, or any immediate Worſhip render'd to him, provided a Man be careful to perform ſo-

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cial Duties. It tends to ſtrengthen a ſelfiſh Diſpoſition, by inſtructing Men to meaſure their Duty wholly by their Intereſt; that no Man is oblig'd to do any thing, or to obey God himſelf in any Inſtance, any further than he ſees it tends in that very Inſtance to his own Intereſt. It diſſolves the ſacred Bands of Truth, and tends to make Men look upon Truth and Falſhood as only Matters of Convenience.

It gives a great Looſe to the Paſſions, and leaves Men to indulge them without any other Rule or Reſtraint, than what every Man thinks to be beſt for himſelf in the Circumſtances he is at preſent under. It in effect deſtroys the Sanctions of the Law of Nature, and tends to make Men entertain very ſlight Thoughts of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, and to free Men from the Dread of divine Puniſhments, and thereby to remove the moſt effectual Reſtraints to Vice and Wickedneſs. I can't help thinking therefore, but that if this Gentleman's Scheme generally prevail'd, it wou'd have a very bad Influence on the Cauſe of Virtue, and of natural Religion it ſelf, and inſtead of being beneficial to Mankind wou'd tend to their great Prejudice, by making the World far wickeder and conſequently more miſerable than it is.

CHAP. IX.

That the Author's Scheme is not fitted to anſwer the Advantages he propoſes by it, of delivering Mankind from Superſtition and Prieſtcraft; and that a ſtrict Adherence to the Chriſtian Revelation wou'd have a happier Influence this Way.

I Have now conſider'd the Author's Scheme in its main Principles, and have ſhewn that it is far from having a friendly Aſpect on the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion in the World; let us now, that we may the better judge of the Tendency of the Scheme he wou'd introduce, examine a little into the great Advantages he propoſes to Mankind by it. The principal Advantage is the delivering Men from the Bondage of Superſtition and Prieſtcraft; let us therefore ſee whether we need have recourſe to this Author to be freed from theſe Evils, and what an Influence his Scheme has this way.

There is nothing of which this Gentleman gives a more diſadvantageous Idea than Superſtition; he repreſents it as worſe than Atheiſm, p. 99, 100. that it has been and is the great Cauſe of Immorality, p. 126. and that it has occaſion'd thoſe Contentions and Perſecutions that

that have so miserably divided and distracted the World.

This Superstition he observes has spread it self over the Face of the whole Earth, and has prevail'd generally in all Times and Places. And he accounts for it thus, p. 169. "'Tis the "Observation of Naturalists (says he) that "there is no Species of Creatures but what "have some innate Weakness, which makes "them an easy Prey to other Animals, that "know how to make the Advantage of it: "Now the peculiar Foible of Mankind is Su-"perstition, which at all Times has made "them liable to be practis'd on, not by Crea-"tures of different Species, but by those of "their own; who by a confident Pretence of "knowing more than their Neighbours, have "first circumvented the Many, the Credulous, "and Unwary, and afterwards forc'd the "free-thinking Few into an outward Com-"pliance.

Here then we see he resolves Superstition into an original Weakness of the human Nature, and not meerly into an adventitious contracted Infirmity; the Nature of Man was originally form'd with this Weakness attending it, or in other words, Man is naturally a superstitious Creature, inclin'd and prone to Superstition, and hence it is that Men in all Ages have been so easily and generally impos'd on, all but the *free-thinking Few*. That we may judge the better of this, let us consider the Account he gives of the Nature of Superstition; he makes all Superstition to "consist in entertaining

"such

" ſuch Notions of God as are unworthy of " him, p. 135." And again, that it " conſiſts in imagining to propitiate an all-wiſe " and gracious Being by ſuch Things as have " no Worth or Excellency in them;" or in " conſidering him to be ſo light or paſſionate, " as with trivial Things either to be appeas'd, " or elſe mov'd to Wrath, p. 146." And it is the Title of his 8th Chapter, " That the not " adhering to thoſe Notions Reaſon dictates " concerning the Nature of God, has been the " Occaſion of all Superſtition." When therefore he ſuppoſes that Men are naturally prone to Superſtition, he muſt ſuppoſe that they are naturally prone to ſwerve from the Notions Reaſon dictates concerning the Nature of God, prone to entertain wrong Notions of the Deity, and to think to propitiate him by Things of no Value. This Gentleman is certainly very unfit to find fault with thoſe who think that the human Nature is now in a corrupt and degenerate State, but that this is not owing to its original Conſtitution which was created by God in the Beginning pure and upright, and wou'd have been tranſmitted ſo (if it had not been the Fault of our firſt Parents, the Fountains and Repreſentatives of the human Race) to their Poſterity; whereas he himſelf aſſerts a Vice, a Weakneſs, call it what you pleaſe, originally cleaving to the human Nature; a natural Proneneſs to Superſtition, that is, to the worſt of Evils, worſe in his Opinion than Atheiſm, and which has ſubjected the human Race to numberleſs Miſchiefs and Miſeries; this he ſuppoſes not to be

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the Effect of a Lapſe, but to ariſe from a Weakneſs or Defect in Man's original Conſtitution; which is really to charge Superſtition, and all the Evils and Miſchiefs ariſing from it, upon God himſelf, the Author of Nature, who form'd Man with this *innate Weakneſs*, as the Author calls it, and with this wrong original Byaſs.

He tells us, p. 170, 171. that *there are two Ways which never fail to make Superſtition prevail, Myſteries and gaudy Shews.* And why can't theſe *fail to make Superſtition prevail?* it muſt be becauſe he ſuppoſes the Byaſs towards Superſtition to be naturally ſo ſtrong that it is ſcarce poſſible to avoid it. And accordingly he ſuppoſes Mankind in all Ages from the Beginning, *Jews, Heathens, Chriſtians*, to have been univerſally involv'd in Superſtition, and thereby ſubjected to the greateſt Calamities, *all but the free-thinking Few*, as he calls them, that is, thoſe that like himſelf have been for entirely rejecting all Revelation.

And now may not his own Declamation againſt Dr. *Clark*, whom he falſly charges with ſuppoſing that "God *plac'd* Mankind without "any fault of their's, in an unavoidable State "of Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 "Years together, and *continues* the greateſt "Part ſtill in the ſame State," be much more juſtly turn'd upon himſelf? This Gentleman undoubtedly looks upon Superſtition to be the moſt wretched State the human Nature can be in; and yet he ſeems to make it in effect *unavoidable*, at leaſt to the Bulk of Mankind;

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and this *unavoidable State of Corruption*, he in effect aſcribes to God himſelf; that he plac'd Men in it without any fault of their's from the Beginning of the World to this Day, ſince he made Men all along from the Beginning with this innate Weakneſs cleaving to their Natures, and with this original Defect in their Conſtitutions. And now it may be ask'd, "whether God did this [that is, made the human Nature with this original innate Weakneſs and Defect] "knowingly, or ignorantly "not foreſeeing the Conſequences? to ſuppoſe "the firſt, is to make him act out of Spite and "Hatred to his Creatures in bringing them in- "to Being, and making that Being a Curſe to "them. Or if the laſt, why was not that De- "fect ſupply'd as ſoon as diſcover'd, p. 399. I return him his own Words, that he may ſee how he likes them when applied to his own Hypotheſis. Indeed nothing can be more unjuſt than this way of arguing, when us'd as this Author uſes it, againſt thoſe that repreſent the Heathen World as in a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy, which Corruption and Degeneracy they ſuppoſe to be owing not to God but to themſelves, and that he did not cauſe but only permitted it. But I don't ſee how he can well avoid the Argument, when urg'd againſt his own Hypotheſis, which ſuppoſes that God made the human Nature with an original and innate Proneneſs to Superſtition; that he himſelf ſubjected it to this Defect and Weakneſs, or to this wrong Byaſs, which has been the Source of all thoſe numberleſs Evils

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that have infested Mankind. How is this reconcilable with his great Principle, that in framing his Creatures God had nothing in View but their own Good? was it for the Good of Mankind to create the human Nature in its original Constitution with an unhappy natural Bent to Superstition? might it not be said upon his Principles, that "this must be the State "God design'd they shou'd be in: And it "wou'd seem not only to be in vain, but a "Crime in them, to endeavour to change that "State, in which God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, thought fit to place them, as he argues, p. 345.

Thus has this Gentleman, who so bitterly inveighs against Superstition on all Occasions, and to this ascribes all the Mischiefs, Immorality, Persecutions that have infested the World, yet made an Apology for it, and by representing it natural and unavoidable, gone a great way to prove it innocent. This Proneness to Superstition is indeed a great Misfortune, but it may help to make us easy, that if it be a Misfortune yet it is no Crime, nor to be charg'd upon us as such. But even this Comfort the Author takes from us by another Part of his Scheme. For he supposes that all Mankind have a clear Light given them, a Light which *like that of the Sun is universal*, shining to all that do *not shut their Eyes against it*, that Reason dictates to all Men just Notions of Religion, so that it is scarce possible even for those of the meanest Capacity to be ignorant of their Duty. And now what a miserable Condition

muſt all Mankind be in upon this Gentleman's Hypotheſis? All prone to fall into Superſtition by an original innate Weakneſs of their Natures, and yet if they fall into it, chargeable with counteracting the cleareſt Light! All Men naturally inlighten'd with right Notions of God and of their Duty, and all of 'em naturally prone to entertain wrong Notions of both! Is not this an admirable Hypotheſis (to uſe the Author's own Words with a little Variation) which tho' it ſuppoſes God has given all Mankind a clear connate Light, yet does alſo ſuppoſe that he has created all Men with a natural Byaſs to Superſtition, which is moſt directly contrary to that Light, ſo that alike in all Ages they have been over-run with it, all but a few ſelect Free-thinkers?

But not to urge this any further, let us now conſider the Remedies this Gentleman propoſes for delivering Mankind from Superſtition, that formidable Evil.

There are two Things about which Superſtition has been principally converſant; the one is, about the Manner and Rites of divine Worſhip; the other is, about the Methods of Men's reconciling themſelves to God, and propitiating an offended Deity: Let us inquire therefore what our Author propoſes on each of theſe Heads.

With reſpect to the former, this Gentleman himſelf owns, that *it is the Voice of Nature that God ſhou'd be publickly worſhipped*, p. 116. This is a Principle of Reaſon that all Mankind have generally agreed in, as alſo that in this

this publick Worſhip of God ſome external Rites ſhou'd be made uſe of. But then as to the proper Manner of worſhipping the Deity, and the Rites to be made uſe of in his Worſhip, here Superſtition has had a large Scope. Mankind in all Ages have for the moſt part given into the moſt abſurd and idolatrous Rites; and then have manifeſted a mighty Zeal for them, as if all Religion conſiſted in theſe Things. This, it muſt be own'd, is a great Evil; but what Remedy does this Gentleman propoſe? It is that the People be taught to regard no outward Rites at all as of divine Inſtitution; but that it muſt be left wholly to Men's Diſcretion to appoint the Manner of divine Worſhip as they think fit. See ſeveral Paſſages to this Purpoſe cited above p. 83. where alſo it is ſhewn, that this very Remedy which the Author preſcribes, the leaving it to Men themſelves to determine as they think proper in Matters relating to divine Worſhip, opens a wide Door to all Superſtitions. It is certain, if we muſt judge by Fact and Experience, that Mankind in all Ages have been apt to form a very wrong Judgment in theſe Things, and when left to themſelves and their own Inventions, have fallen into the moſt abſurd Superſtitions and Idolatries. Even in the politeſt Nations, *Greece* and *Rome*, where this Gentleman tells us *univerſal Liberty was allow'd*, and where as he quotes it from Ld *Shaftsbury*, *Matters were ſo ballanc'd, that Reaſon had fair Play, and Learning and Science flouriſh'd*, p. 101. yet nothing cou'd be more abſurd or unworthy of the Deity than the Rites

of their publick Worſhip. And indeed ſuppoſing, as the Author wou'd have it, that the People were to appoint the Rites of divine Worſhip, what cou'd be expected from the Majority of the People, who he tells us are naturally prone to Superſtition, but ſuperſtitious Rites? And as the Society in every Age has an equal Right, upon his Suppoſition, to appoint what ſacred religious Rites they think proper, it cou'd ſcarce be avoided but that the Number of them wou'd be continually multiplied, till Religion was oppreſs'd and overwhelm'd with their Number and Weight.

But if we ſhou'd ſuppoſe God himſelf by an expreſs Revelation, to declare his Will concerning the Rites of his own Worſhip; to adhere to this wou'd be the beſt Preſervative againſt the Extravagancies of an otherwiſe boundleſs Superſtition.

There are two Things which have generally obtain'd amongſt Mankind with relation to divine Worſhip, when left meerly to themſelves and their own Diſcretion; the worſhipping God by Images, and the Worſhip of inferior Deities, or as this Author calls them, *Mediatory Gods*. The latter of theſe he unmercifully expoſes; that it was owing to the Heathens *debaſing God* and *clothing him with our Infirmities*, and that if *they had thought at all* they had never fallen into it. But yet it is certain that the *Platoniſts*, and many of the moſt refin'd among the Pagan Philoſophers, maintain'd the Doctrine of *Genii* or *Demons*, a Kind of Middle Beings, by whom our Prayers were to be offer'd

fer'd to the Supreme. And however good an Opinion this Gentleman ſeems to have of the Arguments he brings againſt this Superſtition, there is no Likelihood that thoſe Reaſons cou'd ever have prevail'd to ingage them to diſcard that way of Worſhip in general. They might have anſwer'd to what he offers, that it was not that they ſuppos'd (as he charges them) the ſupreme Being to be either *ignorant* or *weak*, or not ſufficiently inclin'd of himſelf to do good to Mankind, but it was only obſerving a proper Method and Order in worſhipping him, becoming ſuch unworthy Creatures in their Addreſſes to the Supreme, and whereby they teſtified the juſt Senſe they had of his infinite Greatneſs and Purity, and their own Meanneſs and Vileneſs. And I don't ſee that any thing this Author has advanc'd proves the contrary. The Heathen Worſhip wou'd probably have prevail'd ſtill, if it had not been for the Chriſtian Revelation, which has provided the moſt effectual Remedy againſt it, which nothing cou'd do before. All that vaſt Multitude of Deities whom the Heathens worſhipped, their *Gods many* and *Lords many* are now diſcarded. We are no more diſtracted with a Multiplicity of Mediatory Gods, which fill'd their Religion with Superſtition, and produc'd a ſtrange Confuſion in their Worſhip, and a vaſt Variety of abſurd Rites, as offer'd ſometimes to one ſometimes to another of thoſe Deities. The Chriſtian Scheme is noble, ſimple and uniform; that as there is but one God, ſo there is but one Mediator between God and Man, through whom all our

Services

Services are to be offer'd. It ſuppoſes a Mediator indeed, which is agreeable to the Senſe Men commonly had (how they came by it I ſhall not now inquire) of the Propriety of this Method in their Approaches to the Deity, but at the ſame time it effectually checks a Superſtition which was grown to a boundleſs Extravagance, and by directing us to the One only Mediator of God's own Appointment has reſcued us from a Multiplicity of Idol-Gods and Idol-Mediators. It is true that amongſt profeſs'd Chriſtians themſelves a Multiplicity of Mediators have been introduc'd, as well as the Worſhip of Images. But then it is alſo true, that it was by *hiding* from the People the Knowledge of the Scriptures that theſe Superſtitions firſt obtain'd in the Chriſtian Church, and they are ſtill kept up by the ſame Methods. And it was by reading the Scriptures that the People at the Reformation diſcover'd the Abſurdity of thoſe Superſtitions and idolatrous Rites; and it is by Arguments drawn from Scripture that they are ſtill moſt unanſwerably confuted. And ſome of the greateſt Advocates for thoſe Things, ſcarce ſo much as pretend to produce Scripture-proofs, but make uſe of ſuch Arguments or Excuſes drawn from Reaſon as the Heathen Philoſophers did before them.

I can't ſee therefore but that if the People were left meerly to themſelves, and to what might be agreeable to their own Imaginations in divine Worſhip without the Guidance of Revelation, they wou'd be much more in Danger of falling into the moſt abſurd Superſtition,

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particularly Image-Worſhip, and the Worſhip of inferior Deities, than they are now.

Having conſider'd Superſtition as it relates to the Rites of divine Worſhip, let us now conſider it in another View, as it is converſant about the Methods of Men's reconciling themſelves to God, and propitiating an offended Deity. It is an evident Principle of Reaſon, that God is a juſt and righteous Being. The Notion of God's Juſtice is as rational and as deeply founded in Nature as that of his Mercy, and hath as univerſally obtain'd amongſt Mankind. And hence it is, that when Men are conſcious to themſelves that they are ſinful Creatures, this Senſe of their Guilt and Dread of his Juſtice will naturally carry them to do whatever they think propereſt to avert his Diſpleaſure. To this it is owing, that Men in all Ages have endeavour'd to find out Ways and Means to attone for their Offences. Here Superſtition has had a large Scope. It is on this Foundation that Men have *tormented themſelves* (as this Author expreſſes it) *with immoderate Watchings, Faſtings, Penances, and Mortifications of all Sorts*, not becauſe they thought(as he is pleas'd to repreſent it)that *God delighted in the Pain and Miſery of his Creatures*, but becauſe they were ſenſible that God is juſt, and that they had ſinned, and therefore thought it proper to expreſs their Sorrow and Remorſe for having offended him, and by afflicting themſelves before a pure and holy Deity, to ſhew that they were ſenſible of their own Demerits. Guilt is naturally a jealous Thing;

Thing; and a guilty Conſcience is uneaſy and reſtleſs, anxious and perplex'd with Terrors; and whilſt a Senſe of Guilt and Dread of the divine Juſtice remains, it will be very apt to put Men upon ſuch Expedients as theſe to avert the divine Diſpleaſure. Hence alſo proceeded human Sacrifices, which obtain'd (as many learned Men have ſhewn, particularly *Grotius de Satisfact. Chriſti, Cap.* 10.) almoſt amongſt all Nations, becauſe they thought as *Cæſar* repreſents the Sentiments of the *Gauls*, *pro vita hominum niſi vita hominis reddatur, Deorum immortalium numen non poſſe placari.*

Now what Remedy does this Author propoſe to remove thoſe Superſtitions that relate to the Methods of propitiating an offended Deity? It ſeems to be this; that on his own Account God is not at all affected whether his Laws be or be not obſerv'd, nor ever acts out of a Regard to his own Dignity and Authority, nor can ever be ſuppos'd to want Satisfaction or Reparation of Honour; that he can never be injur'd by our Sins, nor will ever puniſh the Breach of his Laws as for an Offence committed againſt himſelf, diſtinct from the Harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures; that therefore they need take no Pains to appeaſe the Deity, for he cannot be griev'd or offended with the Sins of us wretched Mortals; nor will he inflict any Penalties upon Sinners, but what flow from the Nature of the Actions themſelves.

It muſt be own'd that theſe Principles, if generally believ'd, wou'd baniſh Superſtition in this

this Sense, as it arises from a Sollicitude to appease an offended Deity, but then they wou'd also banish the Fear of God from amongst Men, and by taking away the most powerful Restraints to Vice, wou'd render the World ten-fold more wicked and miserable than it is.

The *Epicureans* valued themselves mightily upon their delivering Men from the Yoke of Superstition and needless Fears; but then it was by denying a God that governs the World, and a Providence that concerns it self with human Affairs; and it must be own'd their Principles had a Tendency to deliver wicked Men from the Terrors they were under, but then they also depriv'd good Men of their best Supports and Comforts, and took away the greatest Encouragements to Virtue as well as Restraints to Vice: However, their Scheme was more consistent than that of this Author, which as he has dress'd it up is inconsistent and unnatural. He owns a God that governs the World, and gives Laws to Mankind, and yet seems to suppose him little affected whether his Laws be observ'd or not. But this is contrary to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. If God governs the World and gives Laws, it will be hard to persuade Men that he will not vindicate the Authority of those Laws, and out of a Regard to what becomes his own excellent Greatness and Majesty, as well as to the Order and Harmony of the whole moral World, punish the Breach of them. Whilst Men believe that *Justice is eternally inherent in the divine Nature*; that it is

the natural Law that evil Doers ſhould be puniſh'd; and that God's pardoning Sins is *govern'd by his infinite Wiſdom*; that is, that God will pardon Sins no further than his Wiſdom ſees fit to do ſo; all which is plainly aſſerted by this Gentleman, as I have obſerv'd above, p. 197, *&c.* This will naturally create many guilty Jealouſies and Fears; and theſe Fears will put them upon many Ways to expreſs their Repentance and Sorrow for their Sins, and to propitiate an offended Deity; and this will open a Door to many Superſtitions, and make them liable to be practis'd on by cunning and deſigning Men.

But if we ſuppoſe a Revelation from God, aſſuring Men in his Name of his Readineſs to be reconcil'd, and upon what Terms he will pardon their Sins and receive them into Favour; this will be the moſt likely Way to give Satisfaction to their guilty Minds, and to prevent their running into the Extravagancies of Superſtition.

This the Chriſtian Religion hath fully done. It hath diſcover'd to us an Attonement for Sin; but it is an Attonement of a high and peculiar Nature, appointed by God himſelf in his infinite Wiſdom and Love to Mankind, for declaring his Hatred againſt Sin, and vindicating the Authority of his Government and Laws.

The Author's Objections againſt the Doctrine of the Goſpel on this Head will come to be conſider'd afterwards, when we particularly anſwer his Exceptions againſt the Chriſtian Revelation.

velation. At preſent I wou'd only obſerve, that he that believes this will not ſeek any further for the Expiation of his Sins, nor lay any Streſs on thoſe mean and ſorry Expedients which Superſtition has invented for this Purpoſe. He will be far from thinking that God can be propitiated with *light* and *trivial Things*, or *Things of no Worth*, in which this Author makes the Eſſence of Superſtition to conſiſt. The Cuſtom of offering Sacrifices this Gentleman thinks to be very abſurd; and he ſeems to be much diſturb'd at it, becauſe the Prieſts got *the beſt Bits* for themſelves. However it can't be denied, that it was a Cuſtom that generally obtain'd amongſt all Nations, and that from the eldeſt Times of Antiquity. It is alſo evident, that Chriſtianity wherever it has prevail'd has aboliſh'd that Cuſtom, which nothing cou'd do before. And this one ſhou'd think ought to recommend it to his Eſteem. Indeed it is in the Scriptures alone that we have a juſt and rational Account of the true Uſe and Deſign of Sacrifices (of which I have taken Notice before, p. 68.) and that they are all abſolutely ſuperſeded by the Death of Chriſt, who is the Propitiation for our Sins, and not for ours only, but for the Sins of the whole World. It is this that has put an End to thoſe bloody Sacrifices and Expiations, which made a conſiderable Part of their Worſhip before. And if it had not been for this, very probably we ſhou'd have been ſacrificing ſtill, and the Prieſts wou'd ſtill have got the beſt Bits for themſelves, notwithſtanding all this Gentleman cou'd offer to

the contrary; yea perhaps we might have been offering up human Sacrifices, as our Heathen Anceſtors did; and it may be he would not have found it ſo eaſy to diſprove that Principle of the *Gauls* mention'd above, that the Sins of Men cou'd only be expiated by human Blood, if they were to argue it meerly on the Foot of Reaſon, except he cou'd eraſe a Senſe of the divine Juſtice and of their own Guilt out of the Minds of Men, which he might have found it very difficult to do.

But the Chriſtian Revelation provides an effectual Remedy againſt all theſe Things, by aſſuring us of a ſufficient Attonement, which God accepts as a Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, and which therefore abſolutely ſuperſedes the Neceſſity of other Expiations; it gives us the higheſt Aſſurances of God's Readineſs to forgive, and of his being reconcil'd and at Peace with us thro' his Son; than which nothing, where it is firmly believ'd, can poſſibly have a happier Tendency to allay and remove our guilty Jealouſies and Fears; and at the ſame Time it every where, in the ſtrongeſt Manner, inſiſts upon the abſolute Neceſſity of true Righteouſneſs and Obedience; that without this we cannot hope for any Advantage from that Attonement, or any Intereſt in the divine Favour, or a Right to the future Happineſs.

Our Author obſerves from Biſhop *Tillotſon*, "That the Way that Men are apt to take to "pacify God, is by ſome external Piece of Re- "ligion; and that when we apprehend God is "diſpleas'd, we are content to do any thing but

"learn

"learn Righteousness." And since there is such a strong Byas this way in the human Nature, if we shou'd suppose the Christian Revelation discarded, and Men left (as this Gentleman wou'd have them) to themselves and to their own Discretion, I don't see but the People wou'd be in much greater Danger of placing Religion in Things that do not belong to it than they are now. He tells us, that the Heathen Priests taught the People *that the chief Part of Religion consisted in gaudy Shews, pompous Ceremonies, and such other Tricks as serve to amuse and divert the Vulgar*; and he makes himself merry with their *Taurobolia* and *Lustrations by Blood and Water*. He observes also, that the *Mahometans* make the *Pilgrimage to* Mecca *the highest Act of Religion, from which, after many Monkey-tricks, they return cleansed from all Impurity*; that the *Popish Priests have many Arts of reconciling the Practice of Vice with the Prospects of Heaven*, and of *pacifying God by bowing to a Crucifix, by procuring the Intercession of Saints and Angels, repeating Pater noster's and Ave Mary's, by Pilgrimages, giving Estates to Convents, and chastising their Bodies for the Sin of their Souls*, &c. see p. 147, 148, 149. Now 'tis certain that nothing can be a more effectual Remedy against all these, than a steddy Adherence to the Scripture-Revelation; if Men took their Notions of Religion from thence, it wou'd prevent their thinking to compound with Heaven for Immoralities, or laying a Stress on any outward Rites,

as

as if theſe wou'd recommend them to God without real Holineſs of Heart and Life. Our Author himſelf acknowledges this with reſpect to the New Teſtament, and produces ſome Paſſages to this Purpoſe, p. 51, 429. and he might have produc'd many Teſtimonies equally ſtrong out of the Old. And 'tis certain in fact, that the Superſtitions he mentions there prevail moſt where the Scriptures are leaſt read or known; they always abound moſt in Proportion to the People's Ignorance and Unacquaintedneſs with the ſacred Writings. I can't therefore well reconcile it, that at the ſame Time that this Gentleman inveighs ſo bitterly againſt Superſtition, he is for weakening their Regard to the Holy Scriptures, which have been ever found the beſt Preſervative againſt it, and is for leaving the People at large to their own Inventions, which have in all Ages been a fruitful Source of Superſtition.

Let us now conſider the Author's Scheme in another View, as it is deſign'd to deſtroy Prieſtcraft. There is nothing againſt which he ſo furiouſly inveighs throughout his whole Book, and which he ſeems ſo much afraid of as Prieſtcraft. He often complains of the *Authority the Church-Guides have aſſum'd to themſelves, the Powers they have uſurp'd over Conſcience*, &c. and that *the Impoſitions of the ambitious domineering Part of the Clergy have produc'd the moſt fatal Calamities which have befallen the Chriſtian World*, p. 163. and therefore he expreſſes a mighty Concern for the poor *good-natur'd Laity*; and ſets up for

defend-

defending the Liberty given by God to Mankind, p. 121. Now what is the Method this Gentleman propoſes for delivering the People from Prieſtcraft, from Impoſitions, and Tyranny?

It is in ſhort this, to tell the People, that Religion is of it ſelf ſo clear and plain, that every Man may eaſily find it out for himſelf, even though he can't read in his Mother-Tongue; let him but conſult and conſider the Nature and Reaſon of Things, and compare the Ideas of God and the divine Attributes with his own Nature, and conſider and compare the ſeveral Relations he ſuſtains towards God and towards his Fellow-Creatures, and what tends to his own *Happineſs*, his *Health*, his *Reaſon*, and the *Pleaſure of his Senſes*, taken and compar'd together, and he will ſoon come to know the whole of his Duty, he will know what God expects and requires of him, and what he is to expect from God.

But is not this to put the People upon a Work for which the generality of Mankind are evidently incompetent? This Author ſends every Man to the Light of Nature, and his own Reaſon. And what if his own Reaſon and Experience lets him ſee his Ignorance and need of Aſſiſtance? And the better Underſtanding he has, and the more Modeſty, the more ſenſible he will be of this. What if he finds that he cannot of himſelf come to a Certainty or Aſſurance in ſeveral Things that are of conſiderable Importance to him to know? What muſt he do in this Caſe? It is natural for him to apply

ply to those, who he thinks have more Leisure or a better Judgment, or who have consider'd these Things better than himself. And here there may be room for Priestcraft, according to our Author; since he tells us, that "Men are "easily circumvented by those that pretend "to be more knowing than they, and that "most of the prevailing Superstitions have "been erected on this Foundation, and to "this owe their whole Support, p. 169." Now how is this to be prevented? Must every Man think that he knows already as much as any Man can teach him? That is, that there is no Man in the World more wise and knowing than himself? and what is this, but to encourage a pert conceited Ignorance, and effectually bar the way against all further Inquiries, and consequently all Progress in Knowledge; the consequence of which would be universal Barbarism and Ignorance; and this very Ignorance wou'd make way for Priestcraft, and subject Men to be impos'd on by others more cunning than themselves.

It has been the common Voice and Consent of all Nations, as to have outward Rites of publick Worship, so to have some Persons amongst them whose more peculiar Office and Employment it is to administer those Rites, and to whom the Care and Management of Things sacred is committed. Nor does our Author himself seem intirely to condemn this, but he wou'd have the Society to appoint the Persons, as well as Time and Place of divine Worship, p. 116. Be it so, let the People chuse them;

yet

yet their very Office of presiding in the Ceremonies of Religion wou'd soon procure them an Authority and a kind of Sacredness; and if they happen'd to be cunning Men, and hit upon the Methods, which this Author says never fail to make Superstition prevail, *Mysteries* and *gawdy Shews*, I don't see how upon his own Hypothesis, Priestcraft cou'd be prevented; this wou'd soon give them a mighty Influence over the Minds of the People, so that they wou'd have it in their Power to impose upon them what they pleas'd.

But supposing a plain Revelation given as a standing Rule which the People are to read and consider for themselves, here they have a Rule to go by, by which they may examine the Doctrine of their Teachers, and which if attended to, will prevent their being impos'd on in Things of Moment, so that they will be much safer against the Impositions of Priests and false Guides, than if left meerly to themselves without such a Revelation.

Any one that impartially considers the Idea the Gospel gives us of the Christian Ministry, cannot but be sensible that if this had been pursued and adher'd to, instead of being a prejudice, it wou'd have been a great Advantage to Mankind. And this Author himself owns, that whilst the Method made use of in the Apostolical Days was observ'd, *no Inconveniences happen'd, and it was not till after this was broken through that the Christian World was inslav'd, and Religion forc'd to give way to destructive Superstition*, p. 109. Is not this

plainly to own, that the Chriſtian Diſcipline and Miniſtry if it had continued on the Foot and in the Simplicity in which the Apoſtles left it, wou'd have produc'd none of the Inconveniences he ſo much complains of? And if this be his Sentiment, why does he not inſtead of deſtroying the Authority of the Goſpel, endeavour to reclaim Men to the original Purity and Simplicity of the Chriſtian Worſhip and Diſcipline? He frequently complains of the great Miſchiefs done to the World by the extravagant Powers which the Chriſtian Prieſts have aſſum'd to themſelves; but it is very diſingenuous in him to turn this to the diſadvantage of Chriſtianity it ſelf, becauſe he himſelf believes and has taken Pains to prove that there is no Foundation for theſe Powers in the New Teſtament.

But ſays he, "if they who maintain theſe "and other as vile Maxims, have got Poſſeſ-"ſion of Men's Minds, by ingroſſing the "teaching the young as well as inſtructing the "old, what leſs than a new Revelation can "expoſe their Expoſitions, or explain away "their Explanations of the preſent Revelati-"on, which have prov'd more fatal to the Hap-"pineſs of Mankind, than all the Superſtiti-"ons of the Pagan World? p. 406.

But it is eaſy to anſwer, there needs no new Revelation to expoſe their Expoſitions, there needs only a recourſe to the old, which is ſufficiently plain and clear. Nothing is more evident than that the Goſpel no where gives the Prieſts a Domination over the Conſciences of Men, nor

nor exempts them from a Subjection to the Civil Powers. It every where aſſerts the Liberty of the People to judge for themſelves, to ſearch the Scriptures, to try all Things, try the Spirits, *&c.* the Texts on which the Church of *Rome* has pretended to found thoſe exorbitant Claims, have ſcarce ſo much as the Appearance of Probability; nor cou'd he eaſily ſuppoſe any other Revelation that cou'd have leſs in it to countenance them than the preſent. Accordingly is it not from the Holy Scriptures, that thoſe very exorbitant Claims have been moſt ſucceſsfully combated and expos'd? And did not thoſe Powers riſe to their greateſt Height, in a Time when the Laity were kept in Ignorance of the Scriptures? And it is manifeſt from Fact and Experience, that the better the People are acquainted with the ſacred Writings, and the more diligently they read and conſider them, the more effectually are they ſecur'd againſt human Authority and Impoſitions in Matters of Religion. They will indeed have a juſt regard for their Paſtors, and eſteem them highly in Love for their Work's Sake, but they will not be apt to reſign themſelves blindly to their Dictates, and become Slaves to their uſurped Claims. This the Guides of the *Romiſh* Church who underſtand their Intereſt very well are ſenſible of, and therefore in order to keep the Laity in a blind Subjection to their own Authority, ſee it neceſſary to withold the Scriptures from them. Our Author labours the ſame Point; and at the ſame time that he ſo bitterly inveighs

againſt Superſtition and the Tyranny of the Clergy, his real Deſign is to deſtroy the Authority of divine Revelation, and conſequently to take the Bible out of the Hands of the People. This is an odd Proof of his Concern for the *good-natur'd Laity*, and Zeal for their Liberties, and againſt Prieſtcraft and Tyranny, to deprive them of that which is the beſt Security for their Liberties, and the beſt Defence againſt Impoſition and Tyranny. And I am perſuaded that, whatever his Deſign may be, the Effect of taking the Scriptures from the People, and leaving them wholly to themſelves, wou'd be this, that they wou'd ſoon fall into univerſal Darkneſs and Ignorance, and this Ignorance wou'd make way for Impoſture and Prieſtcraft, and expoſe them an eaſy Prey to ambitious and aſpiring Men.

CHAP. X.

An Examination of thoſe Paſſages in which the Author pretends to deſcribe the Religion of a Deiſt, and to draw a Parallel between that and Chriſtianity, with ſome further Proofs that his Scheme is inconſiſtent with it ſelf, and prejudicial to the Intereſts of Virtue, and to the Good of Mankind.

IN order to have a fuller View of the Author's Deſign, it will not be improper to examine thoſe Paſſages in which he particularly attempts to deſcribe the Religion of the Deiſt, and ſhew the Advantages he has above the Chriſtian. There are no Paſſages in his Book wrought up with greater Art than theſe, or more likely to impoſe upon the unwary Reader,

The firſt which I ſhall take notice of is in p. 76. "I ſhall not ſcruple to affirm (ſays he) "that he who ſtrictly adheres to what the "Light of Nature teaches him concerning the "divine Goodneſs, as he will avoid the com- "fortleſs Proſpect of the Atheiſt, the perpe- "tual Anxiety of the Superſtitious, the wild "Perturbation of the Enthuſiaſt, and the per- "nicious Fury of the Bigot, ſo he can't fail "of

" of true Religion happily ſeated in the middle " between theſe Extremes; and as ſuch a Perſon " can't but love God as he ought, ſo in Imitati- " on of the divine Goodneſs he will contribute " his utmoſt to the Good of others, and his " Love and Kindneſs will be as extenſive as the " human Race." And then he asks, " What " can be wanting to a Man who has this hea- " venly, this godlike Diſpoſition, which ren- " ders him happy in himſelf, and as far as it is " in his Power makes the World ſo too?" He adds, that " Men can never have true Senti- " ments of the Goodneſs of the divine Legiſ- " lator, or eſteem his Laws as they ought, till " they are convinc'd he requires nothing of " them but what is for their Good;" and that " theſe Notions early inculcated will cauſe " Men with Joy to obey the divine Laws, and " make them in reality love God, as well as " be beloved of him, who above all Things " requires the Purity of the Mind, and that " Men ſhou'd act not out of a Principle of ſla- " viſh Fear, but from perfect Love void of all " Fear.

He deſigns this for a Deſcription of the Religion of the Deiſt, but it much better fits the Chriſtian. If ſuch a Diſpoſition as he deſcribes be *heavenly* and *godlike*, muſt we not have a high Eſteem for Chriſtianity, which every where requires it, and has the happieſt Tendency to promote it? Nothing can have a greater Influence to form us to an extenſive Benevolence, or can raiſe in us higher Notions of the divine Love and Goodneſs than the Goſ-

pel,

pel, which is indeed little elſe than the glad Tidings of his rich Grace and Mercy to our periſhing Natures, and a Diſcovery of the Methods of his infinite Wiſdom and Love for our Salvation and Happineſs. Every true Chriſtian has the higheſt Aſſurance, that what God requires is generally for the preſent, and always ultimately and in the final Iſſue, for our own greateſt Good and Happineſs.

There is nothing dreadful or melancholy in the Goſpel-Scheme, except to the Wicked and thoſe that reſolve to perſiſt in an impenitent Courſe, whom it is uſeful to fill with Terror; but to the Good, the Penitent, and Sincere, all is joyous and ſerene; a glorious Scene of Comfort opens; the moſt happy Promiſes are made, the moſt glorious Privileges are provided; God hath ſent his Son to redeem them from Death and Ruin, through whom they have the Remiſſion of all their Sins; they are taught to regard God himſelf as reconcil'd, and as adopting them into his Family; his Son as their Head, their Saviour, and Advocate; his Spirit as their Sanctifier, their Comforter, and their Guide, to inlighten, purify, and aſſiſt them in their Duty; his Angels miniſter to them, and all Things work together for their Good; they have Comfort in all their Tribulation, and Support in every Circumſtance; there is a happy World before them, a State of eternal Joy and Felicity, where God himſelf ſhall be their glorious everlaſting Portion.

Hence true Chriſtians are often call'd, and it is urg'd upon them as their Duty, *to rejoice in*

in the Lord, Phil. 4. 4. 1 Theſſ. 5. 16. *Theſe Things write we unto you*, ſays the Apoſtle, *that your Joy may be full*, 1 John 1. 4. Thoſe that really believe all this, muſt needs feel in their Hearts the moſt warm and lively Sentiments of Love and Gratitude, and the powerful and happy Conſtraints of divine Love, removing all their guilty Jealouſies and Fears, and drawing their Hearts to God, whom they cannot but regard as all Love and Goodneſs, a moſt wiſe and pure and juſt Goodneſs, in Conjunction with infinite Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs. The Scheme of the Deiſt compar'd with this, is dark and comfortleſs. It diſcards the comfortable Hopes and Promiſes of the Goſpel, and inſtead of the expreſs and glorious Aſſurances of the Forgiveneſs of Sins and eternal Life that are there given us, leaves Men to their own feeble Conjectures, and to gather theſe Things as well as they can from the Reaſon and Nature of Things. It leaves Men at a great Uncertainty in many Inſtances as to the Duties requir'd of them, and at a ſtill greater as to the Way and Terms upon which God is willing to pardon guilty Creatures, and reſtore them to Favour. It gives them at beſt only ſome general Hopes of the divine Mercy; and if they think at all, they muſt be ſenſible that this ſhall be no further exercis'd than is conſiſtent with the Juſtice and the Wiſdom of God, and the Good of the Whole, which are Things the Reaſons and Meaſures of which are in a great meaſure unknown to us. And is it happier to be left to ſuch Jealouſies and Uncertainties as theſe, than to

to have the Advantage of an expreſs Revelation from God himſelf?

What has been now offer'd may help us to judge of another Paſſage in this Author, where ſpeaking of himſelf and his Friends, he ſaith, "they are in a better State than Chriſtians, even as to temporal Happineſs. Since they "muſt delight in their Duty, as having nothing "requir'd of them, but what they moſt evidently ſee tends to their Good; and conſequently are free (no ſmall Happineſs) from "all pannick Fears; whilſt they who believe "there are Things meerly poſitive in Religion, "of which Reaſon affords no Light how they "are to be perform'd, or even what they are, "muſt lie under endleſs Doubts and Fears, "and according to the Meaſure of Superſtition, be wrought upon by deſigning Men, to "hate, damn, and perſecute one another about ſuch Obſervances; as we ſee is actually "done every where by the different Sects, "who are ſo abſurd, as to believe God can "give his Creatures arbitrary (by which he means poſitive) "Commands, p. 125."

Who has the trueſt Foundation for ſolid Comfort and Satisfaction in this Life, the Deiſt or the Chriſtian, has been already ſhewn. Nor can I conceive upon what Ground the Deiſt can pretend to be exempt *from all pannick Fears*, except by ſuppoſing, which is this Author's comfortable Scheme, that God is not concern'd whether his Creatures obſerve his Laws or not. But if there be Reaſon to think that God will puniſh Sin, and vindicate the Au-

thority of his Government and Laws, the Deiſt cannot be exempt from Fears, and has far leſs to ſupport him againſt them than the Chriſtian.

Indeed I cannot ſee wherein the Happineſs of the Deiſt does conſiſt, which this Writer ſo glorioufly repreſents. Is it that he is govern'd by the Nature and Reaſon of Things? That is, in other Words, he is left to find out his Duty as well as he can, meerly by his own Reaſon, and therefore is happier than he that has beſides this an expreſs Revelation from God himſelf to guide and to aſſiſt him. But he is not troubled with uſeleſs Speculations: that is, he does not believe a Saviour, that God has ſent his Son to redeem us, or that he has given any expreſs Promiſes of the Remiſſion of Sins, and eternal Life; Things, which where they are really believ'd, are a perpetual Source of Joy to good Men. But he is free from the Yoke of *arbitrary Commands*, by which he means poſitive Inſtitutions: and what are theſe? Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, and the publick Worſhip of the Lord's-day. Mighty Advantage! And what Chriſtian that conſiders theſe Things aright, does not think it his Priviledge to obſerve them? But whilſt this Gentleman thinks it ſuch a Hardſhip to be oblig'd to obſerve poſitive Rites in Religion of God's own Appointment, he is for giving the Power into the Hands of the reſpective States and Communities, to lay what Injunctions they think proper in religious Matters; as if it were a greater Priviledge to have Things of this Nature left

to

to the Invention and Imagination of Men, who are ſubject to Humour and Caprice, and who, this Author himſelf tells us, have a kind of natural Bent and Byaſs to Superſtition, than to have them appointed by God himſelf, who we are ſure will appoint nothing as a Means but what he knows to be well ſuited to obtain the end propos'd, and who will take care in every Thing he inſtitutes, to do what is all Circumſtances conſider'd for his own Glory and for our Benefit. But Chriſtians *perſecute one another for ſuch Obſervances.* And is there any Thing in the Chriſtian Revelation to countenance ſuch Perſecutions? If not, why ſhou'd this be turn'd to its Diſadvantage? Human Impoſitions in Matters of Religion and Perſecution have gone Hand in Hand; and if any one examine the Hiſtory of the Church in all Ages, he will find that Perſecutions have been chiefly rais'd not for Things appointed by God, but for Things that had their Original from human Invention; and that the Miſchiefs the Author complains of, wou'd have been avoided, if they had kept to the Simplicity of the Chriſtian Doctrine and Worſhip as laid down in the ſacred Writings.

P. 363, 364, *&c.* After having produc'd a long Quotation from Doctor *Clark*, containing an Abſtract of natural Religion, relating to the Acknowledgment of the Being of a God and his glorious Attributes, his creating the World by his Power and Wiſdom, and his continual preſerving and governing all Things by his Providence, the Obligations we are under to adore

and worſhip him, to praiſe him, and pray to him; to abſtain from all Debaucheries, and exerciſe an exact Government of our Paſſions, *&c.* and that there ſhall be a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments in the Life to come: Our Author calls this the *Deiſts Creed*, and ſays, *the Deiſts will own no doubt, that the Doctor has done them Juſtice.* But the Doctor is far from ſuppoſing, that the Deiſts generally maintain that Scheme of Principles which he there lays down; on the contrary, he ſays, " there is too much Reaſon to believe, that " there are very few ſuch Deiſts as theſe, a- " mong modern Deniers of Revelation.

But let us hear our Author, " all their (the " Deiſts) Principles, as the Doctor repreſents " them, have a direct Tendency to make them " good Men, and contain nothing to divert them " from intirely attending to all the Duties of " Morality in which the whole of their Re- " ligion conſiſts, and which leaves them no " room for thoſe endleſs Quarrels and fatal Di- " viſions which Zeal for other Things has oc- " caſion'd among their Fellow-Creatures, and " whom they pity upon the Account of that " inſupportable Bondage which Superſtition " has in moſt Places laid them under. And " muſt not a Religion which the Doctor has " prov'd to be demonſtrably founded on the " eternal Reaſon of Things, have a more " powerful Influence on rational Beings, than " if it was laid on any other Bottom? How " can a Religion which as the Doctor has de- " ſcrib'd it, carries in all its Parts ſuch evi-

" dent

" dent Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail
" to make Men in Love with their Duty, when
" they must plainly see that and their Interest to
" be inseparable? If Princes requir'd no more
" of their Subjects, and private Men of their
" Neighbours, than to be govern'd by these
" Principles, how happy wou'd the World be
" thus govern'd?

A glorious Panegyrick this, which the Author here makes upon the Deists and their Religion! But if none must be counted true Deists but those that maintain all those Principles, I am afraid there will be found very true Deists among those who glory in this Character; and I can't help suspecting, from several Passages in his Book, that this is far from being a just Account of the Author's own Creed. It is certain that there was scarce any one of these Principles that was not denied or contested by some one or other Sect of Philosophers in the Pagan World; and those of 'em that went furthest often talk'd of many of these Things with great Uncertainty. But let us make the most favourable Supposition, that the present Deists generally maintain those Principles, yet still it must be own'd, that those that believe the Scriptures have a greater Certainty as to these very Principles than the Deists can pretend to have; for they have all the Evidence for them from Reason and Nature that the Deists have; and besides this, they have an express Revelation from God himself, confirm'd by the most illustrious Attestations, assuring them that these Things are so. If therefore these Principles are so excellent

cellent as the Author repreſents them, and produce ſo good an Effect, then the Chriſtian Revelation ought to be highly valued, and cannot but be ſignally uſeful and beneficial to Mankind, ſince it makes the cleareſt Diſcovery and gives the ſtrongeſt Confirmation of thoſe very Principles; ſo that though ſome of the moſt important of them were conteſted before, and either openly denied, or regarded as Matters of doubtful Diſputation, amongſt thoſe that pretended to follow Reaſon and the clear Light of Nature, wherever Chriſtianity is believ'd theſe Principles are univerſally acknowledg'd; which ſhews that after all the Obſcurity this Gentleman complains of in Scripture, it is admirably clear and plain, in thoſe Points that are confeſſedly of the higheſt Importance to Mankind. Thoſe Things which it coſt the Philoſophers ſo much Pains and Study to find out, (and after all they were uncertain and divided about them) are there deliver'd with ſuch Plainneſs and Clearneſs, and ſet in ſo ſtrong a Light, as to be made obvious to the Vulgar and Illiterate.

This Writer mentions it as a great Advantage of the Deiſt's Principles, that they *contain nothing to divert Men from attending to all the Duties of Morality, in which the Whole of their Religion conſiſts, and which leave no Room for thoſe endleſs Quarrels and fatal Diviſions*, &c. But if we muſt judge of the Goodneſs of Principles and of a Religion, by its Tendency to promote Morality in its juſt and noble Extent, as including the Duties we owe to God, our Neighbours, and our ſelves, then certainly

certainly we ought to have the highest Regard for the Christian Revelation, which both every where exhibits the most pure and refin'd Morality, and furnishes the most powerful Motives and Arguments to ingage Men to the Practice of it. It *contains nothing to divert Men from attending to all the Duties of Morality.* It every where inculcates in the strongest Manner, the absolute Necessity of universal Holiness; not meerly of an outward Reformation, but of an inward Purity of Soul, and that nothing else will do instead of a real substantial Piety and Righteousness. All Things there have a direct Tendency to Practice; its Doctrines, both those of natural Religion, which it confirms and sets in the strongest Light, and its more peculiar Doctrines (which this Gentleman thinks fit frequently to represent as *useless Speculations*) are design'd not meerly to amuse and entertain, but to kindle good Affections in the Soul, to raise in us the highest Love to God, and Admiration of his sovereign Grace and Mercy, together with the profoundest Reverence of his Justice and Righteousness; which are the Dispositions that best become reasonable Creatures towards God. And even the positive Rites it injoins, which are few and simple, instead of diverting Men from Morality, are design'd to bind them more strongly to it, and to bring them under the most express and solemn Engagements to live to God in a Life of Righteousness and Purity, in Obedience to the Laws, and in Imitation of the Example of the Redeemer. The Heathens themselves were sen-

sible

ſible that this was one great Deſign of the Chriſtian Rites, as appears from the famous Teſtimony of *Pliny*, who ſhews far more Candor in judging of Chriſtianity than our Author.

If there have been endleſs Quarrels and fatal Diviſions occaſion'd by Zeal for other Things, &c. this is not chargeable on Chriſtianity, which by the Author's own Acknowledgment tends to take Men off from laying too great a Streſs on meer outward Obſervances, and every where condemns a bitter Zeal about theſe Things. Controverſies about *Words*, and that *miniſter Strife rather than godly Edifying*, are there forbidden; univerſal Charity and brotherly Love and mutual Forbearance are there recommended in the ſtrongeſt Manner; which if obſerv'd, cou'd not but have the happieſt Effect, and wou'd deſtroy the Seeds of Animoſities, and promote univerſal Benevolence and Peace amongſt Mankind. But cou'd theſe Gentlemen accompliſh their Deſign of aboliſhing the Chriſtian Religion, wou'd there be no Quarrels or Diviſions! The Contentions wou'd then be not about the meer Appendages, but the main Foundations of all Religion; about a Providence, about a State of future Rewards and Puniſhments, about the Immortality of the Soul, about the Differences of Good and Evil, about Man's Free-agency, &c. many of which have been denied or controverted both by Philoſophers of old, and by ſome of our Author's own Friends of late imbark'd in the ſame glorious Deſign with himſelf.

And

And as to what he thinks trifling Debates, does not he himself say, "that there are Things "which have no Worth in themselves, yet "because those that have can't many times be "perform'd without them, these are to be con-"sider'd as Means to an End;" and these he wou'd have "left to human Discretion, to be "varied as best suits those Ends for whose Sake "alone they were instituted, p. 431." And might not Men, if left meerly to themselves and their own Discretion in such Matters, differ about these Things, and the Fitness of these Means, and might not this produce Quarrels and Contentions? Might not some think those to be fit Means which others thought the contrary, and might they not be for imposing their own Sentiments and their own Observances (of which Men usually have a very good Opinion) on others? There were Contentions about Things that had nothing to do with true Religion before Christianity appear'd, and wou'd be though it were abolish'd. And if there were not much Blood shed in the Heathen World about such Matters, it was because their great Men and Philosophers universally complied with the Religion of their Country, and the establish'd Rites, however absurd and contrary to Reason, and to the Honour of God; and when these Superstitions and Idolatries were openly attack'd by the Christians, it soon appear'd that the Zeal which the Heathens had for these Things carried them to the Extremes of bloody Rage and Violence. The best Way to free Mankind from trifling Debates, and from a

too great Regard to idle Superſtitions and uſeleſs Obſervances, wou'd not be to caſt away the Chriſtian Revelation, in which Caſe, they would probably be far more expos'd to 'em than now, but to adhere ſtrictly to the Simplicity and Purity of Religion as laid down in the Goſpel.

It is a plauſible Pretence to *make Religion conſiſt wholly in Morality*, as this Gentleman tells us the Deiſts do. But if it appears upon Examination that it is only a defective Morality which they wou'd introduce; a Morality which under pretence of advancing ſocial Virtue has little regard to that Part of Religion which conſiſts in the Duties we more immediately owe to God; if it be a Morality like this Author's, mean and ſelfiſh, which carries Men to terminate all their Views in themſelves, and to meaſure every Thing by their own narrow Intereſts; if it be a Morality which can allow Men to lie and to deceive, when they think it for their Convenience to do ſo, and which leaves them at large to indulge their Appetites and Paſſions, their Luſt and Revenge, in Inſtances where the Goſpel-Law reſtrains them; if under pretence of reducing Religion to Morality alone they are for diſcarding thoſe Doctrines and Principles, which have the nobleſt Influence on Morality, and furniſh the moſt powerful Motives and Encouragements to it, it becomes us to be upon our Guard againſt ſuch ſpecious Pretenders.

The *Epicureans* wou'd make as plauſible an Harangue, to ſhew the Advantages of their Scheme, as the Author has done for his. They declar'd

declar'd for Morality and Virtue alone, and were for rejecting all uſeleſs Speculations; but then the moſt important Principles of natural Religion paſs'd with them for uſeleſs Speculations. It was a uſeleſs Speculation to believe that God created the World, or that he governs it by his Providence, or to believe the Immortality of the Soul and a future State. They cry'd up Virtue, but at the ſame Time ſap'd its Foundations, under pretence of following it for its own ſake, without the ſervile Motives of Rewards and Puniſhments. They, like this Author, pitied the reſt of Mankind groaning under the inſupportable Yoke of Superſtition, and undertook the glorious Work of delivering them from their Bondage, by freeing them from the Fear of God, the Apprehenſions of a Providence, and a future Judgment; for they thought that whilſt theſe Opinions prevail'd, it was impoſſible to get rid of the Terrors of Superſtition. They therefore ſet up for the greateſt Benefactors to Mankind. And every one knows how glorioufly *Lucretius* ſpeaks of the Obligations the World was under to *Epicurus* on that Account. Our Author therefore may go on to cry up the Advantages of his Scheme, but certainly none but very unthinking People will be impos'd on by ſuch Pretences, which it is eaſy for any Man to make, that has but Confidence enough to do ſo.

But ſays he, "muſt not a Religion which "the Doctor has prov'd to be demonſtrably "founded on the eternal Reaſon of Things, "have a more powerful Influence on rational "Beings, than if it was laid on any other Bot-

" rom?" But I ask, muſt not a Religion which gives a clear and plain Revelation, confirm'd by the Authority of God himſelf, of the great Principles that lie at the Foundation of Morality, ſo as to render them obvious to every Capacity, be preferable to that which leaves the Vulgar to gather theſe Things as well as they can, every Man for himſelf, by conſidering and comparing the Natures and Relations of Things, and by abſtracted Reaſonings, for which they have evidently little Leiſure or Capacity, or elſe leaves them to the Diſputes and Wranglings of the Philoſophers? Muſt not a Religion, which not only ſuppoſes the Duties of Morality to be founded in Nature and Reaſon, but to be expreſly requir'd and commanded by God himſelf, and inforc'd by the moſt glorious Promiſes of eternal Rewards, in Caſe of Obedience, and by the Threatnings of eternal Puniſhments, in Caſe of a preſumptuous impenitent Courſe of Diſobedience, have a greater and more powerful Influence than that which ſtrips them of thoſe Sanctions, or at leaſt greatly weakens the Belief of them? Muſt not a Religion, which gives Sinners the moſt expreſs Aſſurances in the Name of God, of Pardon and Acceptance upon their ſincere Repentance, give greater Encouragements to Repentance, and have a greater Influence to comfort the truly Penitent, than that which leaves them in this Matter only to their own Conjectures, and to ſome general Hopes of the divine Mercy, which in a Soul conſcious to it ſelf, that it has in many Inſtances offended and tranſgreſs'd the divine Law, may be

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easily over-rul'd by the Jealousies and Suspicions of a guilty Mind, and the Apprehensions of divine Justice?

Again, he asks, "how can a Religion, "which as the Doctor describes it, carries in "all its Parts, such evident Marks of Wisdom "and Goodness, fail to make Men in Love "with their Duty, when they must plainly "see that and their Interest to be inseparable? This Description suits admirably well to the Christian Religion, which makes such amiable Displays of the divine Grace and Mercy towards Mankind, as cannot but cause our Hearts to flow forth towards him in Love and Gratitude; which represents our Duty in the cleareſt Manner, and provides for us the most effectual Assistances, and gives us the greatest Encouragements to the Performance of it; which makes such engaging Representations of the glorious Privileges, that good Men are or shall be invested with, and contains such *exceeding great and precious* Promises in the Name of God himself, as where they are really believ'd, cannot but convince us that our Interest and Duty are inseparable.

He concludes, "If Princes requir'd no more "of their Subjects, and private Men of their "Neighbours, than to be govern'd by these "Principles, how happy wou'd the World be "thus govern'd?" That is, in other words, if Deism were establish'd, what a happy World wou'd it be? But if Mankind be so corrupt and deprav'd, that they not only break through the Restraints of natural Religion, (which Christianity

anity does not enervate, but leaves in their full Force) but beſides this, break through all the additional Ingagements to Virtue and Reſtraints to Vice, which the Chriſtian Religion furniſhes, what wou'd they do if theſe Ingagements and Reſtraints were laid aſide? Is there not Reaſon to think, that on ſuch a Suppoſition the World wou'd be far more wicked and diſſolute, and conſequently more miſerable than it is? The Author here ſeems willing to allow, that *Princes ſhou'd require of their Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours* to believe and profeſs the *Principles* contain'd in what he calls the *Deiſt's Creed.* This puts me in mind of a Propoſal made not long ſince by a Friend of the Author's, that "nothing but "the Law of Nature, the Obſervance where-"of is abſolutely neceſſary to Society, and "what can be built thereon, ſhou'd be inforc'd "by the Sanctions of the Civil Magiſtrate; "which Law will then be beſt underſtood, "beſt eſtabliſh'd, and beſt executed, when it "is not propos'd to eſtabliſh any thing elſe, or "to puniſh Men for the Breach of any thing "elſe. This Propoſal lays the feweſt Re-"ſtraints upon Liberty, and beſt ſupports Li-"berty without encouraging Licentiouſneſs." *See Scheme of literal Prophecy, p.* 432, 433. But I believe the Gentlemen that take upon them the Character of Deiſts, wou'd not eaſily agree among themſelves, what is that *Law of Nature*, and what thoſe Principles *built thereon* which they wou'd have to be inforc'd by the Sanctions of the Civil Magiſtrate, and for

for the Breach of which Men ſhou'd be puniſh'd. And I am afraid if it were requir'd of them to believe and profeſs all that is contain'd in what he calls the Deiſts Creed, many wou'd cry out of Impoſition as much as they do now, and think it as great a Hardſhip to be oblig'd to this, as to be oblig'd to believe and profeſs the Bible. And I very much queſtion whether this Author himſelf cou'd ſubſcribe all thoſe Articles, except on the Principle he advances, that it is lawful to deceive thoſe that wou'd impoſe Opinions upon others, in which the State is not concern'd, as probably he wou'd think it is not in ſome of theſe.

And now having conſider'd the advantageous Repreſentation this Gentleman has here made of the Deiſts and their Principles, I think I have a Right in my Turn to propoſe ſome Queſtions as well as he. Shall we diſcard a Religion which contains the moſt admirable Syſtem of pure and refin'd Morality, and that in plain Propoſitions obvious to the Vulgar, directing them in every Part of their Duty; which gives the nobleſt Ideas of God and of a Providence, and of a State of future Retributions; which makes the moſt glorious Diſcoveries of the divine Grace and Mercy, and thus lays a Foundation for the moſt ſolid Joys to the Upright and Sincere; and yet at the ſame time makes the moſt awful Diſplays of his righteous Vengeance againſt the Preſumptuous and obſtinately Diſobedient; which recals Men from thoſe Idolatries and Superſtitions, in which they were univerſally involv'd, to the pure Adoration

tion of the one living and true God; which ſtrengthens natural Obligations with all the Inforcements of a divine Authority, and of poſitive expreſs Promiſes and Threatnings, which it is evident always had and always will have a mighty Influence on Mankind? Shall we not, if we love the Cauſe of Virtue and Goodneſs, love ſuch a Religion as this? And what can we think of thoſe that labour with ſo much Zeal and Induſtry to deſtroy its divine Authority, to rob good Men of the Hopes and Joys it affords them, and to deliver the Wicked from the wholſom Terrors it inſpires, to lay open natural Religion, that Morality which they pretend to cry up and admire, naked and deſtitute of its moſt powerful Supports, neither inforc'd by Promiſes, nor guarded by Terrors, under Pretence of leaving it to its own native Force and Beauty? I muſt own that after all the mighty Zeal they profeſs for the Law of Nature, I can't help ſuſpecting that one of their principal Prejudices againſt Chriſtianity is, that it ſets the great Principles and Doctrines even of natural Religion, ſuch as the Doctrine of a Providence, the Immortality of the Soul, and a future State of Retributions, in too clear and ſtrong a Light, which otherwiſe wou'd be left at large to the Diſputes of the Philoſophers, and perhaps be regarded only as the Amuſements of the Schools.

That this is not a raſh Cenſure, will further appear by conſidering another Paſſage, in which this Writer draws a Parallel between Deiſts and Chriſtians, p. 367, 368. "'Tis the View (ſays he)

he) " with which an Action is done that makes " it moral; he who pays his Debts out of a " Principle of Honeſty, does a moral Action; " while he who does the ſame for Fear of the " Law, can't be ſaid to act morally. And can " he who does a Thing to avoid being puniſh'd, " or in Hopes of being rewarded hereafter, " and for the ſame Reaſon is ready to do the " contrary, merit at leaſt equally with him " who is in love with his Duty, and is govern'd " not by ſervile Motives, but by the original " Obligation of the moral Fitneſs of Things, " in Conformity to the Nature and in Imita- " tion of the perfect Will of God? This the " Doctor will not deny to be true Deiſm, and " they who do not act thus, deſerve not the " Title of true Deiſts.

The Author here evidently inveighs againſt acting with a View to future Rewards and Puniſhments; he repreſents thoſe that do ſo as govern'd *by ſervile Motives*, and yet one Article of that which he calls the Deiſt's Creed, and which he wou'd have to be a true Account of their Principles, is that there muſt be a State of Rewards and Puniſhments in the Life to come; ſee p. 365. And he ſaith of all theſe Principles as the Doctor repreſents them, and therefore of this amongſt the reſt, that they have a direct Tendency to make Men good. How partially does this Writer judge! When he thinks it proper to repreſent it as a Principle of Deiſm that there ſhall be a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, then it is a very good Principle, and of an excellent Tendency;

but this very Principle, when confirm'd and ſet in a clearer ſtronger Light by the Chriſtian Revelation has quite loſt its Tendency, and takes Men off from the Love of Virtue for its own ſake, and from attending to the original Obligation of the moral Fitneſs of Things. He ſuppoſes a Chriſtian, that believes a State of future Retributions, to act not from any Approbation of Virtue, but purely *in hope of being rewarded hereafter, and to avoid being puniſh'd*, and that *for the ſame Reaſon he is ready to do the contrary.* And may not this be equally ſaid of every Deiſt that believes future Rewards and Puniſhments? Why ſhou'd it be more mercenary and ſervile in the One than in the Other? And if a View to the Reward be conſiſtent in a Deiſt with the Love of Virtue and Goodneſs, why ſhou'd it not be ſuppos'd conſiſtent with it in a Chriſtian? Why ſhou'd he ſuppoſe concerning a Chriſtian more than a Deiſt, that for the ſame Reaſon (that is, for the Hope of being rewarded or Fear of being puniſh'd hereafter) he is *ready to do the contrary*, that is, to practiſe Vice inſtead of Virtue? But indeed the Suppoſition it ſelf is not to be admitted; that eternal Glory ſhou'd be annex'd to a vicious Courſe of Action, and eternal Miſery be the Conſequence of a virtuous Life here on Earth. 'Tis infinitely abſurd, and not reconcilable to the Notion of a juſt, a wiſe and good God, and therefore impoſſible; but if it were poſſible, I don't know whether it wou'd not be unnatural to chuſe eternal Miſery on any Suppoſition whatſoever.

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The Reward Christianity proposes is of such a Nature, that to aspire after it has nothing mean or sordid in it, but argues a noble Temper of Mind. For it is the Perfection of Holiness and Purity and Goodness in the Enjoyment of God himself the chiefest Good; and to suppose that those Persons who are animated with a View to this Reward, wou'd for the same Reason, that is for the sake of the same Reward, ingage in a contrary Conduct, is a self-confounding Supposition; it is to suppose the same Persons to be so in love with Virtue, as to seek for Happiness in the Perfection of it; and then that out of this very Love of perfect Virtue, and for the sake of it, they shou'd ingage in a Course of Vice and Wickedness. But why shou'd this be here represented as the Character of a Christian, as distinguish'd from the true Deist, that he acts from a View to future Rewards and Punishments? Does none but the Christian believe them? Or is it the Character of a *true Deist*, that he has no View at all to those future Rewards and Punishments, which is in effect to say that he does not believe them; for if he does believe them, 'tis impossible and contrary to human Nature to have no Regard to them, and not to be influenc'd by Motives that are of such vast Importance to our Happiness? And is not this to give a very disadvantageous Character of the Deists and of Deism, and to give Christianity a vast Advantage above it? Has not this Author unawares opened Part of his Scheme, and shewn what he wou'd be at? And I can't help suspecting, that one great

Quarrel againſt Chriſtianity is its ſetting future Retributions in too clear and ſtrong a Light, which wou'd not ſuffer Men to be eaſy in their Vices.

But the Deiſt is *in love with his Duty*, and is *govern'd* not *by ſervile Motives*, but *by the original Obligation of the moral Fitneſs of Things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God.* I have obſerv'd before, p. 228. how little Right this Author has upon his Principles to talk of the Deiſts acting *in Conformity to the Nature*, and *in Imitation of the perfect Will of God*? Nor do I well underſtand what he means here by his being *govern'd by the original Obligation of the moral Fitneſs of Things*, in Oppoſition to his being govern'd by *ſervile Motives*? Does not he himſelf explain the *Fitneſs of Things* to be a Fitneſs for promoting our Good or Happineſs? And muſt not then the original Obligation of the Fitneſs of Things be, according to him, the Obligation that the Fitneſs of Things for our Good lays upon us? So that, according to him, the Foundation of all moral Fitneſs and that which renders it obliging, is its Tendency to our Good or Happineſs; and if ſo, it muſt be either our Good here, or in a future State taking in the whole of our Exiſtence. And if it be not thought mercenary and ſervile to be ingag'd by a Regard to the Satisfaction Virtue yields, and the Influence it has on our own and the publick Good in this Life, why ſhou'd it be thought mercenary to act with a View to the happy Effects it will produce in a better World

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and a nobler Community, in a future State of Exiſtence, which muſt be ſuppos'd to be of as much greater Importance than the preſent, as that future Life is ſuppos'd to be of infinitely greater Duration than the preſent, and of a higher and more excellent Kind? The Man that embraces and purſues Virtue meerly for the Good it is ſuppos'd to produce now, without Regard to a future State, muſt if he acts conſiſtently whenever Virtue ſubjects him to greater Inconveniences in this preſent State reject it, and embrace Vice for its preſent Advantages; whereas the Man that acts with a View to a future State, will not be ſhock'd by any preſent Inconveniences that may attend a ſteddy Adherence to the Cauſe of Virtue and Righteouſneſs; for he extends and inlarges his Views to a nobler State of Exiſtence, and therefore manifeſts a truer Greatneſs of Spirit, and a more generous Soul.

Does not this Author ſay, that "the only "innate Principle in Man, is the Deſire of "his own Happineſs, and the Goodneſs of "God requires no more than a right culti-"vating this Principle, *&c.* p. 263." And why then does he blame a Man for acting up to what he makes the only innate Principle in the human Nature? If as he tells us, all that the Goodneſs of God requires, is a right cultivating this Principle, that is, the Deſire of Happineſs, why is a Man to be counted ſelfiſh for cultivating this Principle, and purſuing what he takes to be for his higheſt Good? Does not this Gentleman frequently inſtruct us

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to measure Good and Evil, and the Fitness of Things, meerly by that which is so to us, and that we are under no Obligation to pursue, nor can God himself command us any Thing, but what we know to be for our Good, and to tend in the Nature of Things to our own Happiness, antecedently to that Command? And shall the Man that talks thus, pretend to set up for a disinterested Regard to Virtue, and blame those that are animated to pursue it with the Views of a future Reward, that is, of the Happiness it will raise us to in a future State, when he himself makes the very Reason of its being obligatory, to be only the Good or Happiness it produces? Nay, when he wou'd have us so very mercenary, as before we obey any Command, to examine whether it tends to our own Benefit or Interest, and if it does not (though it shou'd bring no Hurt with it, yet if it brings no apparent Advantage to us) we are under no Obligation to obey? So that the Measure of our Obedience must be our own Interest. What an inconsistent Scheme is that of our Author? To be govern'd by the moral Fitness of Things (which he talks so much of, and which makes so glorious a Sound) is nothing else, according to him, than to judge of Things by their Tendency to promote our Good or Happiness, and yet we are to be govern'd by the Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things, without any View to our Happiness, though their Tendency to produce and promote it, is that in which their Obligation and Fitness consists. Does not this Writer in the

the preceding Page, p. 366, give it as a Reason, why the Religion of Nature (that Religion which he there represents as the Religion of true Deists) cannot *fail to make Men in love with their Duty, because they must plainly see that and their Interest to be inseparable?* And now he represents a true Deist, as one that is in love with his Duty, without any Regard to his Interest, when the Reason he gave but just before, why they shou'd be in love with their Duty, was, that they must plainly see it to be inseparable from their Interest. Here he represents Men's having any Regard to their own Happiness in the Performance of their Duty, as a Being govern'd by servile Motives; there he represents it as a setting Religion in a beautiful and amiable Light, to consider it as tending to promote our truest Interest, and that in this very Tendency, its Beauty and Excellency does consist. Here he says, that for a Man to be in love with his Duty for its own sake, abstracted from all Advantages attending it, *this is true Deism*, and *they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of true Deists*; or, in other Words, none are true Deists, but those that in the Performance of their Duty, have no Regard to future Rewards or Punishments, that is, who do not believe them; for it is impossible not to have a Regard to them if they do indeed believe them; but there he represents it as one of the *true Deist's* Principles, that he believes future Rewards and Punishments, and that these Principles (which here he intimates tend to make Men

Men ſervile, and ruin the Merit of their Services) have a direct Tendency to make Men good, by cauſing them to ſee that their Duty and Intereſt are inſeparable. How ſhall we judge of what this Gentleman underſtands by Deiſm? Or who are his true Deiſts? All that I can gather from it is, that with this Author all are true Deiſts that oppoſe Revelation, and if they do ſo, he will be very eaſy as to leſſer Differences, whether they own future Rewards and Puniſhments or not, or indeed whether they own a Providence or not; theſe are Trifles, ſmall Differences, yea methinks he can't but approve thoſe diſintereſted Deiſts, that do not believe and have no Regard to a future State, as the nobler of the two, and Men of greater Merit, and more perfect Virtue.

Another Paſſage I wou'd take notice of, in which he pretends to give an Account of his true Deiſts, and compares them with the Chriſtian, is p. 371. where after having ſaid, that a previous Examination into the Doctrines of Scripture is highly neceſſary, he adds, "the "Difference between thoſe who wou'd ingroſs "the Name of Chriſtians to themſelves, and "thoſe Chriſtian Deiſts as I may juſtly call "them is, that the former dare not examine "into the Truth of Scripture-Doctrines, leſt "they ſhou'd ſeem to queſtion the Veracity "of the Scriptures; whereas the latter, who "believe not the Doctrines becauſe contain'd "in Scripture, but the Scriptures on Account "of the Doctrines are under no ſuch Appre-"henſion. For having critically examined

"thoſe

" those Doctrines by that Reason which God
" has given them, to distinguish Religion from
" Superstition; they are sure not to run into
" any Error of Moment, notwithstanding the
" confessed Obscurity of the Scriptures; and
" those many Mistakes that have crept into
" the Text, whether by Accident or Design.

It is pleasant enough here to see, that this Gentleman and his Friends set up for Christians, yea and better Christians too, though they do not believe in Christ nor his divine Mission, than those that firmly believe all this. But let us consider the Reasons he gives why he and his Brethren shou'd have the Preference.

The former, says he, that is, those that, as he speaks, *wou'd ingross the Name of Christian to themselves*, or in other words, those that believe the Bible to contain a divine Revelation, *dare not examine into the Truth of Scripture-Doctrines, lest they shou'd seem to question the Veracity of the Scriptures.* This is an unfair and unjust Representation. They dare *examine into the Scripture-Doctrines*, and upon a fair and impartial Examination are convinc'd that they are worthy of God, and of an excellent Tendency; and when they further consider the Attestations and Evidence whereby those Doctrines stand confirm'd, they are persuaded of their Truth. They find upon Examination, that many of the Doctrines contain'd there relate to the great Principles of natural Religion, such as those concerning the Attributes and Providence of God, the Worship due to him in Opposition

to all Idolatry, the Obligations of Morality, or the Neceſſity of Holineſs, Truth, Juſtice, Charity, Temperance, a future State of Retributions, the Happineſs that ſhall be conferr'd upon the Righteous, and the Puniſhment that ſhall be inflicted upon the Wicked; they find upon Examination, that theſe Doctrines are highly agreeable to Reaſon; and it is a great Satisfaction to them, that in Things of ſuch Importance they are not left meerly to find them out by tedious Deductions and abſtracted Reaſonings (which often leave ſome Doubts and Suſpicions in the Mind, even where we are not able diſtinctly to point out a Flaw in them) but that they have them expreſly and ſtrongly aſſerted in a Revelation confirm'd by ſuch glorious Proofs and Atteſtations. And with reſpect to the peculiar Doctrines of the Goſpel, ſuch as thoſe relating to the divine Miſſion and Mediation of Jeſus Chriſt, his dying for our Sins, his Reſurrection from the Dead, and Aſcenſion into Heaven, Remiſſion of Sins thro' his Name, the Aſſiſtances of his Grace and Spirit, his Coming to Judgment, the Reſurrection of the Dead, *&c.* As theſe relate to Things which they cou'd not have known without Revelation, ſo upon a fair Examination they find nothing in them impoſſible or abſurd, nothing but what is worthy of the Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs and Goodneſs of God, and admirably ſuited to the State and Neceſſities of Mankind, and what ſuppoſing it true has a happy Tendency to ingage Sinners to return and yield themſelves to God, to love him with a ſuperlative Affection,

Affection, and fear him with the profoundeſt Reverence, to comfort the truly Penitent and Sincere, and encourage and animate them to a patient Continuance in well-doing, without giving the leaſt Encouragement to the obſtinately wicked and preſumptuous Sinner. And tho' the excellent Tendency of theſe Doctrines cannot alone prove them true, yet when they find that thoſe that firſt publiſh'd them to the World, declar'd they were ſent by God himſelf for that Purpoſe, and in Confirmation of their Miſſion wrought ſuch aſtoniſhing Miracles as far exceeded all human Power, and therefore cou'd only be done by the immediate Power of God himſelf, or by ſome good Being ſuperior to Man, acting under the Influence and Direction of the Supreme; ſince evil Beings wou'd never lend their Aſſiſtance to confirm a Religion and Doctrines of ſuch a Tendency, the principal Aim of which was to prepare Men for eternal Happineſs in a better World, by a Life of Purity and Righteouſneſs in this; I ſay, when they conſider this, it convinces them that thoſe Doctrines are not only good in their Tendency, but that they are actually true, and that it is the Will of God they ſhou'd receive them as ſuch. Thus their Examination of the Scripture-Doctrines, which they find to be of ſuch an excellent Tendency, prepares them for believing them; but then the Reaſon why they actually believe them to be true, is becauſe they are taught and deliver'd by Perſons that were extraordinarily ſent of God to inſtruct Mankind, and who produc'd the moſt illuſtri-

ous convincing Proofs of their divine Miſſion. And what is there abſurd in ſuch a Conduct? Why ſhou'd this Author repreſent it as a ſtrange Thing, that thoſe who believe the Scriptures to be written by Men extraordinarily ſent by God to inſtruct the World, and infallibly guided by his Spirit; is it ſtrange I ſay, that thoſe who have this Idea of the Scriptures ſhou'd give Credit to the Doctrines contain'd there; that is, is it ſtrange that Men ſhou'd believe what they regard to be the Word of God, and that they ſhou'd receive Things upon the Credit of it, which they wou'd not have believ'd or known without ſuch a Teſtimony? Muſt not even thoſe that deny the Divinity of the Scriptures, yet own that on Suppoſition God reveals a Thing, his revealing it is a Proof of its Truth, which depends upon this undeniable Principle, that God cannot reveal a Falſhood, that he cannot deceive or be deceiv'd, and that therefore what he diſcovers and wou'd have us believe as true, muſt certainly be ſo? Shall I truſt and believe God himſelf in nothing, but what my own Reaſon cou'd have diſcover'd without him; and whenever he informs me of any thing I did not know before, reject it for no other Reaſon, but becauſe I have no more than his Teſtimony for it?

But let us conſider what he repreſents to be the Conduct of the Deiſts, with reſpect to Scripture. *They*, ſays he, *believe not the Doctrines becauſe contain'd in Scripture, but the Scripture on Account of the Doctrines.* Do the Deiſts then (thoſe Gentlemen whom he is pleas'd

pleas'd to honour with the Title of *Christian Deists*) believe the Doctrines of Scripture? Do they believe the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity, relating to the divine Mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dying for the Sins of the World, his Resurrection and Ascension, Remission of Sins through his Blood, and Sanctification by his Spirit, and his Coming to judge the World? Let them declare this, and we will not deny them the Name of Christian; but if the contrary is evident, if they reject all Notion of Revelation as Priestcraft and Imposture, and all the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity as false and fictitious, how can they be said to believe *the Scripture on Account of the Doctrines*, and under this Pretence put in a Claim to the Name of Christians, when they believe neither the Doctrines nor the Scripture, and it may be more justly said that they reject the Scripture on Account of the Doctrines? What an insincere disingenuous way of talking is this? It is easy to gather from it, that the Author wou'd not fail upon Occasion to put in practice his own Doctrine concerning the Lawfulness and Benefit of Falshood and Prevarication in many Cases, and that if his Convenience requir'd it, he cou'd declare his Belief of the Christian Creed, though he does not believe one Word of it but perhaps the first Article. This Gentleman and his Brethren often inveigh against the Frauds and Prevarications of the Clergy, but I believe it wou'd be hard to produce a greater Instance of it than in this Passage.

If

If there be a Revelation given at all, it muſt be to inform us of Things which we cou'd not have known, or at leaſt cou'd not have known ſo well and ſo certainly without it; and in ſuch a Caſe to pretend to pay a Regard to that Revelation, and yet receive nothing upon the Credit of it, wou'd be a very abſurd and inconſiſtent Conduct. When therefore this Writer tells us concerning thoſe he calls *Chriſtian Deiſts*, that *they believe not the Doctrines becauſe contain'd in Scripture*; it is to ſay in other Words, the Scripture is of no Weight and Authority with them at all, and they will receive nothing upon the Credit of it; and our Author's Treatment of the Scriptures in this Book will not ſuffer us to doubt that this is his own Sentiment. But do we not in many Caſes give Credit to the Teſtimony of wiſe and credible and good Men, and receive Things upon their Teſtimony, which we ſhou'd not have receiv'd or known but from their Teſtimony? Are there not many Things which we believe becauſe contain'd in credible Hiſtories, and will the Deiſts pretend a Regard to the Scriptures, and at the ſame time deny 'em the Reſpect due to other Hiſtories written by wiſe and good Men? to ſay we believe the Hiſtories for the Facts, and not the Facts for the Hiſtories, is not very good Senſe; for how do we come to know thoſe Facts but becauſe they are tranſmitted to us in authentick Hiſtories? or cou'd we poſſibly have known thoſe Facts without 'em? it may therefore be juſtly ſaid, that we receive 'em on the Credit of thoſe Hiſtories.

Let

Let us then deſire theſe *Chriſtian Deiſts* but to yield the ſame Credit to the Scriptures, that they wou'd to any credible Hiſtory writ by a Man of Probity, that was himſelf a Witneſs to the Facts he relates; even in this Caſe it muſt be ſaid, that they believe the Facts becauſe contain'd in the Scriptures, recorded in authentick Writings, written by honeſt Men that were Witneſſes of thoſe Facts, and in the very Age in which thoſe Facts were done. But if they believe 'em not to be written by Perſons of Probity, but by Knaves and Impoſtors, and that conſequently the Goſpel is a meer Impoſture, how can they be ſaid to believe the Scriptures at all, or to pay any Regard to 'em, or arrogate to themſelves the Title of Chriſtian Deiſts? On the other hand, if they believe the Scripture Hiſtory, and receive the Facts related there, they muſt alſo believe the peculiar Doctrines of Chriſtianity, becauſe contain'd in the Scriptures thus glorioufly atteſted. For many of thoſe Doctrines relate to the Facts, the one being inſeparable from the other. For the principal Facts are, that Jeſus Chriſt was born of a Virgin, that he perform'd the moſt illuſtrious Miracles, that he ſuffer'd and died, and roſe again on the third Day, that he aſcended into Heaven, and afterwards poured forth his Spirit upon his Diſciples in a wonderful Manner, ſo that they were enabled in his Name to perform the moſt glorious Miracles, and were inſtructed and inlightned by an extraordinary Illumination in the Knowledge of the deep Things of God, that they went as commiſſion'd by him thro'

all

all the World, preaching the Gospel of the glad Tidings of Reconciliation and Salvation to Mankind through Jesus Christ, and confirming the Message they deliver'd by the most glorious and astonishing Works done in the View of Multitudes, *&c.* Now the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity have a close Connexion with these Facts, and if we receive the latter we must receive the former too. Supposing the Facts related concerning Christ and his Apostles to be true, the Doctrines they taught may be justly receiv'd on their Credit; that is, we may justly believe them, because those taught them who were extraordinarily sent by God to instruct Mankind; and to pretend to believe this and not give Credit to their Doctrines, wou'd be an Inconsistency.

The Conduct this Author thinks reasonable with respect to the Scriptures, is indeed very extraordinary. He is for pretending a Regard to 'em, and at the same time for believing nothing on their Credit. It is hard to please these Gentlemen. If the Scriptures had nothing in them but what Men might have discover'd themselves by the meer Force of their own Reason, they are needless; for where is the Necessity of an extraordinary Revelation, to tell Men what they knew as well before? But if they discover any thing which Men did not know before, and cou'd not have known unless it had been there reveal'd, this shall also be turn'd to their Disadvantage; to believe the Doctrines on Account of the Scriptures, is represented as a foolish Conduct; since they have nothing else

to

to support 'em but the Authority of Scripture, and this is nothing at all.

The Author concludes concerning his Christian Deists, that "having critically examin'd "the Scripture-Doctrines by that Reason "which God has given them, to distinguish "Religion from Superstition, they are sure "not to run into any Error of Moment, not-"withstanding the confess'd Obscurity of the "Scriptures, and those many Mistakes that "have crept into the Text, whether by Acci-"dent or Design.

It is not fair in this Author to talk of the *confess'd Obscurity of the Scriptures*, as if this was a Matter universally acknowledg'd, when yet he knows that it has been all along and still is an important Principle maintain'd by all Protestants, that the Scripture is sufficiently clear and plain in all Things necessary to be known or done in order to Salvation. The Mistakes which he says have crept into the Text, are not such as alter any one Doctrine, or any one Fact of Christianity. But not to take any particular Notice of these Things at present, which our Author here only hints at, and which I shall fully consider afterwards, I wou'd ask how came the Deists to be so priviledg'd, that *they are sure not to run into any Error of Moment*? They *exāmine Doctrines by the Reason God has given them*, &c. But has not God given Reason to others as well as them, and may they not make an ill Use of their Reason as well as other People? And thereby fall into very dangerous Errors

in Matters of great Moment? Did not the *Epicureans* pretend to make use of their Reason as well as our modern Deists, to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; and did this exempt 'em from Errors of Moment? I cannot therefore see upon what Foundation this Priviledge of Deistical Infallibility is built. It might further be ask'd, to which among the several Sets of Deists this Priviledge belongs, or whether it belongs to all of 'em, however divided among themselves about the Immortality of the Soul, a State of future Rewards and Punishments, Man's Free-agency, *&c.* which others might be apt to think Matters of Moment?

CHAP. XI.

The Author's Pretence of introducing a new and glorious Face of Things examin'd. That his Doctrine of Sincerity as he manages it is of small Comfort and Advantage, and leaves little Room for any Men, or even for the Deists themselves, to hope for the divine Favour and Acceptance. His Proposal for an universal Indifferency to all Religion, as the only Remedy against Persecution; and the Charge of Persecution he advances against the Advocates for Revelation turn'd upon himself. The Conclusion, with a brief Representation of the pernicious Tendency, and manifold Inconsistencies of the Author's Scheme.

THERE is no Passage in his whole Book, in which the Author talks more magnificently of the Benefits that wou'd accrue to Mankind from his Scheme, than p. 413, 414. where he pretends that it wou'd introduce *a new Heaven and a new Earth, a new and glorious Face of Things.* There are two Ad-

vantages that he particularly propoſes; the one is, to deliver Men from the Terrors and Anxieties they are under *for Fear of miſtaking in ſpeculative Matters*; the other is, to put an End to all Perſecutions and Animoſities, and *to cauſe an univerſal Love and Benevolence among the whole Race of Mankind*. Let us ſee whether he offers any thing that may ſupport theſe glorious Pretences.

The great Principle he lays down as what wou'd produce theſe happy Effects is this, that "all that are equally ſincere are equally acceptable to God; that this wou'd free Men "from that miſerable Perplexity in which the "Fear of miſtaking in ſpeculative Matters involves them." He asks, "What Aſſurance "upon any other Ground can even the Generality of Chriſtians have, that they do not "err moſt dangerouſly, when they conſider "what Diviſions there have been from the Beginning among Chriſtians about ſuch Points, p. 413. And deſires Perſons to "conſider "what Comfort, what Satisfaction it muſt "give a Man, eſpecially on his Death-bed, to "be certain that he is not accountable for any "Error in Opinion, if he has, according as his "Circumſtances permit, done his beſt to diſcover the Will of God, p. 414.

In order to judge of the Advantages of this Principle, taken in the Senſe which our Author puts upon it and as it is explain'd by him, let us examine a little into his Notion of Sincerity. He ſeems in the Paſſage laſt cited to underſtand by a Man that is ſincere, "one that has, ac-

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" cording as his Circumſtances permit, done " his beſt to diſcover the Will of God." And again, p. 410. he ſaith, that " if God will " judge Men as they are accountable, that is, " as they are rational, muſt not the Judgment " of the moſt righteous Judge hold an exact " Proportion to the Uſe they have made of " their Reaſon? And if Men's State in this " Life be a State of Probation, and for that " Cauſe they are made moral Agents, capable " of knowing Good from Evil, and conſe- " quently of doing every thing that's fit to be " done, muſt they not be dealt with hereafter " according to the Uſe they have made of " their moral Agency?" To the ſame Purpoſe he ſpeaks, and almoſt in the ſame Words, in his firſt Chapter, p. 5, 6. Sincerity then, according to this Author, muſt imply, that Men have done their beſt to diſcover the Will of God, that they have made the beſt Uſe of their Reaſon and moral Agency they are capable of. And ſince the ſame Gentleman that gives this Account of Sincerity, does alſo tell us, that every Man is capable both of knowing and doing the whole Will of God, or whatever it is his Will we ſhou'd know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe; it follows, that according to him no Man can be ſaid to be ſincere, or to have done his beſt, and that conſequently no Man can hope to be juſtified before God, that does not both know and do the whole Will of God, or all that it is his Will Men ſhou'd know, believe, profeſs and practiſe; ſo that Sincerity, according to him, is not conſiſtent with Ignorance

of

of a Man's Duty, or with imperfect Obedience. And thus we ſee what this Author's comfortable Scheme comes to at laſt, the Advantages of which he ſets forth ſo glorioufly.

He has indeed thought proper to add a Limitation, *of a Man's doing his beſt, according as his Circumſtances permit, to diſcover the Will of God*, p. 414. and he has other Paſſages to the ſame Purpoſe. But I don't ſee how he can make uſe of this Limitation, in Conſiſtency with his own Scheme. For this Limitation ſuppoſes that ſome Men are in much more advantageous Circumſtances than others for knowing the divine Will; a Suppoſition very true in it ſelf, but which this Author cannot make without deſtroying a good Part of what he labours in this Book to ſhew, *viz.* That the Law of Nature, that Law which he ſuppoſes to be obligatory on all Mankind, and which contains all that God will have Men to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe, is equally obvious to all Mankind, that it is at all Times *equally diſcoverable* by all, even thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity and that cannot read in their Mother-Tongue, p. 295. and that no Man can have *a juſt Plea from Ignorance* not to be tried by that Law, p. 10. This Gentleman therefore has no Right to talk, as he ſometimes does, of Men's knowing natural Religion as far as is neceſſary in their Circumſtances, and of their being accepted *if they live up to their different Degrees of Light*; for he ſuppoſes all Men to have an equal Light given them, the Light of Nature, which he all along repreſents

as

as equal, uniform, univerſal. Thoſe indeed who ſuppoſe that Men are now in great Darkneſs, and under great Diſabilities to their Duty, may alſo ſuppoſe that God will mercifully make Allowances to human Ignorance and Infirmity; and that Errors in Knowledge and Faults in Practice may be conſiſtent with ſuch a Sincerity as God will in his infinite Goodneſs accept. But this Author precludes himſelf from this Plea.

There is no Allowance on his Scheme for involuntary Errors. For all Errors in religious Matters muſt, according to him, be voluntary. He tells us himſelf, p. 178. "that the clear "Light [*viz.* of Reaſon] which God hath "given Men to diſtinguiſh between religious "Truth and Falſhood, cannot, if duly attend-"ed to, deceive them in Things of ſo great "Moment." And, p. 277. after having ſaid that "what we call Inſtinct is a certain "and infallible Guide for inferior Animals," he adds, that "Reaſon is as certain a Guide "for rational Creatures, as Inſtinct is for irra-"tional." Reaſon therefore muſt, according to him, be a certain and infallible Guide in religious Matters. If therefore we be miſtaken in judging of religious Truth and Falſhood, it muſt be for want of *duly attending* to our Reaſon, and the Light God hath given us; and if we do not duly attend to it, we cannot be ſaid to have *made the beſt Uſe of our Reaſon and of our moral Agency*, and then by his Definition of that Sincerity which alone will render us acceptable to God, we are not ſincere; ſo that

that upon his Scheme our being in an Error in religious Matters, or our not distinguishing between religious Truth and Falshood, must be a Proof of our Insincerity, and therefore must be a Bar to our Acceptance. And is this the Author that pretends to *free Men from the miserable Perplexity in which the Fear of mistaking in speculative Matters involves them*? How can he pretend to talk of the *Comfort and Satisfaction it must yield a Man on his Death bed, to be certain he shall be accountable for no Error in Opinion, if he has done his best to discover the Will of God*, when according to him, a Man's being in an Error, or mistaking a religious Truth for Falshood, or the contrary, is a plain Proof that he has not done his best, nor made a due Improvement of his Reason, which, if duly attended to, wou'd have guarded him from any Error in such Matters? How can he say, as he sometimes does, that if a Man has sincerely examin'd, even tho' he shou'd be mistaken, he has done his Duty and all that God requires; when, according to him, a sincere Examination, or a Man's making the best Use of his Reason, will certainly lead him to the Truth; and if notwithstanding his Examination, he still judges wrong concerning religious Truth or Falshood, this shews that his Examination was not sincere, or of the right kind, and consequently cannot approve him to God.

Indeed I don't see but that after all the Author's glorious Pretences of delivering Men from their Fears, all Mankind must according to

to him be in a miserable Condition, and under an inevitable Condemnation. All that he offers concerning the Clearness of the Light of Nature to all Mankind, tends to destroy the Plea of Sincerity, which might otherwise be offer'd as some Excuse for the Frailties and Errors they are guilty of. He tells us, that "the Light "of Nature, like that of the Sun, is universal, "and would, did not Men shut the Eyes of "their Understanding, or suffer others to blind "them, soon disperse all those Mists and Fogs "which arise from false Traditions, or false In-"terpretations of the true Tradition, p. 12. And again, he tells us, that all Superstition arises from "Men's not adhering to those No-"tions Reason dictates concerning the Nature "of God, p. 69." That "Reason and Re-"ligion are inseparable, so that no rational "Creature can be ignorant of it [that is, of the true Religion] "who attends to the Dictates "of his own Mind, p. 379." And yet he also declares, that Superstition hath universally prevail'd in all Ages and Nations from the Beginning; none have been exempted from it but *the free-thinking Few.* He must therefore suppose concerning all Ages and Nations, that they did not make a right Use of their Reason or moral Agency, that they did not attend to the Light that was given them, and to the Dictates of their own Minds, that they all shut their Eyes against the clearest Light, and consequently were all destitute of that Sincerity, without which they cannot hope for Acceptance with God, or for any Reward from him.

Our Author seems to value himself upon his entertaining a better Opinion than others do of the Condition of the Heathens, and mightily blames Dr. *Clark* for speaking as he does of the corrupt and degenerate State into which they were fallen; and yet I can't help thinking, that the Representation he himself gives of their State, renders it much more hopeless, and leaves less Room for any favourable Thoughts concerning them, than even the most zealous Advocates for Revelation are willing to allow. He tells us, that the Law of Nature was so clear, *that no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of it*, and at the same time he often supposes, that the Idolatries and Superstitions in which they were generally involv'd were directly contrary to the Law of Nature; he must therefore suppose that there was scarce such a thing as a *well-meaning Gentile* for many Ages, which is to cast them at once out of all Hopes of the divine Favour. He supposes that "Mankind at all times have entertain'd such Notions of God as are intirely inconsistent with his Nature, and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, wou'd inform them of the Design and End of the Laws of God, p. 88. And he particularly charges the Heathens on the Account of their worshipping the *Mediatory Gods*, as he calls them, as *entertaining the most unworthy Notions of the Supreme Being*, as *debasing God, and cloathing him with our Infirmities*, and that *if they had thought at all* they cou'd not have fallen into such Absurdities, p. 86. 'Tis plain then that he supposes the

the Heathens in general, not the Vulgar only, but the Philosophers themselves, particularly the *Platonists*, the most refin'd of them all, to have entertain'd the most unworthy Notions of God, contrary to the clearest Dictates of Nature, and which they cou'd not have entertain'd if they had attended to the Light that was given them to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, or even if they had allow'd themselves to think at all; and that consequently they did not make the best Use of their Reason to discover the Will of God, and therefore were not sincere, nor consequently accepted of God.

I don't know whether it will make the Case of the Heathens better, that he supposes the Jews, and Christians, and Mahometans to be under the same Condemnation. For they are all, in his Opinion, chargeable with gross Superstition, and therefore none of them can take any Comfort from the Author's Doctrine of Sincerity; because none of them have made a proper Use of their Reason and moral Agency, but have shut their Eyes against that clear universal Light, which, if attended to, wou'd have taught them easily to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, and wou'd have dispell'd the Mists and Fogs of a false Tradition; they must therefore, according to him, be all of them destitute of that Sincerity, which he makes to be the only Title to the divine Favour, and therefore must be all without any solid Hopes of Salvation, except the *free-thinking Few*, that is, those who like our Author reject all Revelation, despise all the Religions

in the World, and believe none of them; all the reſt have been in all Ages, and ſtill are involv'd in an univerſal Degeneracy and Apoſtacy from the clear Light of Nature, and have fallen into Superſtition, which in his Opinion is worſe than Atheiſm.

And even with reſpect to his own Friends, *the free-thinking Few*, thoſe who profeſs to adhere to pure natural Religion, his Scheme is not ſo favourable as it ſeems to be at firſt View. The Queſtion is, Upon what Grounds do they hope for Acceptance with God, or to be juſtified before him? He tells us, that *God gave Mankind from the Beginning a Rule or Law for their Conduct, by the Obſervance of which they were acceptable to him*, p. 3. And he wou'd be *glad to know, why this Rule has loſt its Virtue, and will not now render Men as acceptable to God as ever*, p. 399. And this original Law of Nature, by the Obſervance of which alone he ſuppoſes Men can be juſtified and accepted with God, he aſſerts to be a Law *of unchangeable Purity and Perfection*, a *Law without Defect*, and *to which nothing cou'd be added by our Saviour*, p. 82. and that *if Mankind had govern'd their Actions by it, it wou'd have render'd them as perfect as their Natures are capable of*, p. 399. that is, they wou'd have attain'd to a State of perfect Virtue. I don't ſee therefore upon what Grounds he and his Friends can hope to be juſtified by that original Law of Nature, except they can plead, that they have attain'd to perfect Virtue, and that they have in their Practice

tice obſerv'd and fulfill'd that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection.

But he will ſay this Law accepts of Sincerity, that is, of a Man's doing the beſt he can. Thus he tells us, p. 5. that "Men's uſing their Faculties after the beſt Manner they can, muſt "anſwer the End for which God gave them, "and juſtify their Conduct, p. 5." And that "God's Judgment muſt hold Proportion to "the Uſe they have made of their Reaſon, and "it wou'd be in vain to uſe it if the due Uſe of "it wou'd not juſtify them before God, p. 6. But ſince he ſuppoſes that God *adjuſted* Man's original Ability and Underſtanding to that perfect Law, and that this original Ability ſtill continues; ſince he ſo often ſuppoſes that all Men have a clear Light and Knowledge of that Law of Nature, and that their Reaſon, *if duly attended to*, cannot deceive them in judging of religious Truth and Falſhood, and that all Men are *capable of doing* as well as *knowing the Will of God*, that is, of obeying that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection; I don't ſee how he can conſiſtently ſuppoſe that any Man has *us'd his Faculties after the beſt manner he can*, or has made a *due Uſe of his Reaſon*, who is in any Inſtance ignorant or miſtaken about that Law, or who in his Practice falls ſhort of the Duties requir'd in that Law; and conſequently I don't ſee, that any Deiſt upon his Principles, or he himſelf, can have any Ground to hope for being accepted with God, or juſtified before him, except he be ſure that he has not fallen ſhort in his Practice of what

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that Law requires, nor has miſtaken any of the Principles of that Law. No Man, according to him, can plead Ignorance of that Law, nay nor Want of Ability neither; he precludes himſelf and all Men from all Plea for Mercy on this Account. All the fine Things he ſometimes ſaith of the human Nature in its preſent State, the clear and perfect Light all Men have to know their Duty, and their Ability to diſcharge it, only ſerves to render their Ignorance and Diſobedience more inexcuſable, and to bind the Curſe and Sentence of the Law faſter upon them. Whereas the Goſpel repreſents Things as they really are, that all Mankind are fallen into a State of great Corruption, Darkneſs, and Diſability, that God pities us in this State, and has in his infinite Mercy provided a ſuitable Remedy for us, and will mercifully pardon our Infirmities, and accept and reward our Obedience, though attended with many Failures and Defects, if proceeding from a Heart prevailingly devoted to him.

The Sum is this: Suppoſing the Tenor of the original Law of Nature to run thus, that thoſe that uſe their Faculties after the beſt Manner they can, and that make the beſt Uſe of their Reaſon (which is the Suppoſition this Author makes) ſhall be accepted and juſtified before God, yet this does not ſay, that he will juſtify thoſe that have not made the beſt Uſe of their Faculties and of their Reaſon; and it has been ſhewn, that this Gentleman muſt ſuppoſe this to have been the Caſe of almoſt all Mankind in all Ages, Heathens, Jews, and Chriſtians.

Christians. Nor will he and his Friends have any Benefit from it, if either they be conscious to themselves that in their Practice they fall short of what that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection requires, or if they be in an Error about the Principles of that Law; [as some of them certainly must, since they are divided about those Principles, and 'tis impossible they all shou'd be in the right] because this wou'd argue, according to him, that they have not made the best Use of their Faculties, nor duly attended to their Reason, which yet he seems to make the only Plea for being accepted with God. So that after all the Author's Boasts of the Advantages of his Scheme, it really lays a Foundation for perpetual Anxiety and Terror, and leaves little room for any Man, or even for the Deists themselves, to hope for the divine Favour or Acceptance.

This will further appear, if it be consider'd that this Gentleman tells us in his first Chapter, that "God never intended Mankind shou'd "be at any time without Religion, or have "false Religions, and that there is but one "true Religion which all have been ever "bound to believe and practise, p. 5." And again, that "God design'd that all Mankind "shou'd at all times know, what he wills them "to know, believe, profess, and practise." And must not this, according to his own way of arguing, cause many Fears and Anxieties? For when Men hear there are some Things which it is necessary for them to believe, profess, and practise, how can they help being solicitous

licitous to know what these are, and being in pain lest they have mistaken them? This Writer is pleas'd frequently to mention it to the Disadvantage of Christianity, in order to shew what an anxious State professed Christians must be in, that they have Fundamentals, and yet are divided about them. He asks, "What "Assurance can they have that they do not "err most dangerously, when they consider "what Divisions there have been from the "Beginning among Christians about such "Points? And that the Guides of their "Churches, though they agree in saying their "Fundamentals are plain, have not always the "same Set of Fundamentals, and when they "have, widely differ in explaining them, p. 413. See also p. 137, 138, 242. The Foundation upon which this Reflection proceeds is indeed very wrong, and that is, that it is impossible to be certain of the Truth of any thing about which Men have been divided in their Sentiments. For then there is nothing certain at all, not even the Being of a God. It is not meerly Men's agreeing or disagreeing about Points that renders them more or less certain; this is to be tried by other Arguments; and if upon an impartial Examination I find good Reason to believe a Thing my self, it ought not to make me doubt of it meerly that I see others deny it. But not to urge this at present, what I wou'd observe is, that this way of arguing bears as hard upon the Deists as upon the Christians. It appears from the Passages now cited, that there must be Fundamentals

upon

upon his own Scheme. For what are Things neceſſary to be *known*, *believ'd*, *profeſs'd*, and *practis'd* but Fundamentals? And may not the ſame Demand be made upon him that he makes upon others, to let us know what theſe Fundamentals are? And the Demand is more juſt upon him, becauſe he ſuppoſes 'em to be neceſſary to all Mankind, which we do not ſuppoſe concerning the Fundamentals of the Chriſtian Religion as ſuch, which thoſe only can be bound to believe or profeſs who have heard of the Goſpel. And as there muſt be Fundamentals in natural as well as reveal'd Religion, ſo there is no Probability that the Deiſts any more than the Chriſtians wou'd all agree in the ſame Set of Fundamentals. Some might probably reckon the Doctrine of a Providence, Man's Free-agency, the natural Difference between moral Good and Evil, a State of future Retributions, among Fundamentals neceſſary to be believ'd; others wou'd reject many of theſe, and either believe 'em not to be true, or not to be neceſſary. It is well known that the Enemies of Revelation are divided in theſe Points. They agree in nothing but in their Oppoſition to Chriſtianity. And as the Deiſts wou'd thus differ in their Creed, ſo if any of 'em ſhou'd agree *in the ſame Set of Fundamentals*, there is great Probability that they *wou'd widely differ in explaining them*; I don't doubt as widely as Chriſtians do in what they ſuppoſe Fundamentals. If therefore it proves that Chriſtians can have no Aſſurance that they do not err moſt dangerouſly, becauſe there have

been Diviſions about the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith; muſt it not equally prove, that the Deiſts can have no Aſſurance that they do not err moſt dangerouſly, ſince there have been and are great Diviſions about the Articles of natural Religion, or thoſe Things which he ſuppoſes it to be the Will of God they ſhou'd know, believe, and profeſs? Theſe Things he ſuppoſes to be ſo very clear and plain, that every Man that attends to the Light given him may eaſily know them; ſo that the Plea of Sincerity (which according to him includes a Man's making the beſt Uſe of his Reaſon and moral Agency in the Circumſtances he is in) can have no place in Errors of this kind.

The Author probably is not inſenſible of theſe Difficulties; and therefore he has, tho' in Contradiction to himſelf, fix'd on another Expedient, to make the Deiſts and all others eaſy, and that is, that no Principles or Opinions at all are of any Conſequence to human Happineſs; and therefore Perſons need not trouble their Heads about them. This ſeems to be the Deſign of what he propoſes, p. 412, 413. Having expos'd, as he thinks, Dr. *Clark*'s Aſſertion, that Chriſtians have the Means and Opportunities of obtaining a higher Degree of Happineſs than the Heathens, he adds, "that "this is a Notion which lays a Foundation for "everlaſting Perſecution, ſince it will oblige "Men as they love their Children, Families, "Friends, Neighbours, and Relations, to uſe "any Means, come into any perſecuting Mea-"ſures, to prevent ſuch Opinions from ſpread-

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" ing, as they imagine wou'd deprive them of " that Degree of Happineſs, which otherwiſe " they might ever enjoy; and is it not chiefly " owing to this Abſurdity, that even the moſt " moderate of the different Sects are far from " treating one another with that Benevolence " which the common Ties of Humanity re- " quire?" And then he tells us, that " did " Men believe that all who were equally ſin- " cere were equally acceptable with God, " there cou'd be no Pretence for the leaſt Par- " tiality, much leſs for Perſecution either po- " ſitive or negative: Nor cou'd any Man love " another the leſs for the wideſt Difference in " Opinions; and then of courſe Men's Indig- " nation wou'd be wholly bent againſt Immo- " rality, *&c.*" He adds, that " this Princi- " ple, and this alone, wou'd cauſe univerſal " Love and Benevolence among the whole " Race of Mankind: And did it prevail, muſt " ſoon produce a new and glorious Face of " Things; or in the Scripture-Phraſe, a new " Heaven and a new Earth.

It is plain here that the Author ſuppoſes, that as long as Men look upon any Principles at all to be of great Importance to the Happineſs of Mankind, and upon other Principles to have a pernicious Influence, this will lay a Foundation for everlaſting Perſecution; ſince this will oblige them to uſe any Means, and come into any perſecuting Meaſures, to ſpread thoſe Principles which they think to be of Conſequence to their Happineſs, and to hinder the ſpreading of others which they look upon as pernicious,

and of an ill Tendency. Accordingly the Remedy which he here recommends for the preventing Perſecution, and introducing univerſal Benevolence ſeems to be this, to regard no Principles at all as either conducive to our Happineſs, or as having an ill Influence upon it, that is, to look upon all Opinions as indifferent and of ſmall Moment. And now this may let us into a true Diſcovery of the Author's Views, that his Deſign in ſaying that where Men are equally ſincere they are equally acceptable to God, is this, that it is of no Conſequence to a Man what Religion he is of, or what Principles he holds; and if this proves that there is no Neceſſity of believing Revelation, and that Men need not concern themſelves about it; it equally proves the Non-neceſſity of natural Religion too; that they need not trouble their Heads, whether they believe aright in theſe Things any more than in Points of pure Revelation, and ſo even the Knowledge of natural Religion (which this Writer at other times ſuppoſes ſo neceſſary, and for which he profeſſes ſo great a Zeal) is of no Uſe or Importance to our Happineſs. It is of no Conſequence to us, whether we have juſt Notions of God or of his Attributes, or of the Worſhip we render him, or of the Duties we owe to God, to our ſelves, or to one another. If he ſays, that ſome Knowledge of theſe is neceſſary in order to the Practice of Morality, or of the Duties incumbent upon us, then this is to own that ſome Principles are of great Importance to our Happineſs, and that we ought to regard them as ſuch, and there-

therefore cannot possibly regard them as indifferent, nor can help looking on the contrary as dangerous; which according to him leads to Persecution, and subverts that blessed State of Things, that *new Heaven and new Earth* which he so gloriously describes, and by which he seems to mean no other than an universal Indifferency to all Religion.

Indeed the Way of arguing he makes use of to fix the Charge of Persecution upon the Advocates of Revelation, will equally fix it upon all those that have the Interests of natural Religion at heart. 'Tis certain that any Man that is a true Deist, and really believes the great Principles of natural Religion, relating to the Being and Attributes and Providence of God, Men's Free-agency, a future State of Retributions, and the natural Differences between Good and Evil, must necessarily look upon these Principles to be of very great Importance to the Glory of God, and to the Good of Mankind, and to the Cause of Virtue in the World; and whilst he thinks so, it is impossible, if he has a just Concern for the Interests of Virtue and the Good of Mankind, but he must be concern'd for the maintaining and spreading those Principles; and on the other hand, he ought if he acts consistently, to have as great an Abhorrence of the contrary Principles of the Atheist and Epicurean, as the Christian has; he must necessarily think them of the most pernicious Consequence to Mankind, and therefore must be sollicitous to use all lawful Means in his Power to prevent the spreading of such mischievous

chievous Principles; nor can he have the ſame Eſteem for thoſe that propagate ſuch Principles, and whom therefore he cannot but look upon as Enemies to the Cauſe of Virtue, as for thoſe that promote it. Suppoſing Men's *Indignation bent wholly againſt Immorality* (as this Gentleman requires) they muſt of Courſe, have a very ill Opinion of thoſe Principles, and have a Zeal againſt them, which they think encourage Immorality, and have a Tendency to weaken the Intereſts of Virtue, and to promote Vice and Wickedneſs. Thus the late Lord *Shaftsbury* manifeſts a noble Zeal againſt thoſe that, like *Hobbes*, deny the natural Differences of Good and Evil, and it is evident, that he looks upon them as advancing a Scheme deſtructive of all Virtue.

Nor wou'd it alter the Caſe, though we ſuppos'd that *all that are equally ſincere are equally acceptable with God*, which is the Principle the Author advances as what wou'd effectually prevent Men's loving one another the leſs, for the wideſt Difference in Opinions; for ſtill whilſt a Man regards ſome Principles as of moſt pernicious Conſequence to the Intereſts of Virtue, and to the Happineſs of Mankind, he muſt have a Zeal againſt thoſe Principles, and muſt think the Authors and Abettors of them very ill employ'd, and have no very good Opinion of their Sincerity; eſpecially if we take Sincerity in that Notion which this Gentleman himſelf has advanc'd, for a Man's making the beſt Uſe of his Reaſon,

ſon, and the beſt Improvement of his moral Agency which he is capable of, which I believe a true Deiſt could not think the Atheiſt or *Epicurean* to have done.

The Argument we are now upon, furniſhes a new Proof of this Writer's Inconſiſtency. For though here he ſeems to preſcribe the looking upon all Opinions to be alike indifferent, as the only way to avoid Perſecution, and promote univerſal Benevolence, yet in other Places he frequently ſuppoſes ſome Principles to be of great Importance to the Good of Mankind, and others to be of a quite contrary Tendency. Indeed the very Deſign of his whole Book is to ſhew the miſchievous Tendency of ſome Opinions and Principles, and the excellency of others, particularly of his own, which he repreſents as every way amiable and beneficial. He tells us in the Paſſage cited before of an *univerſal Religion* which *all have been ever bound to believe and practiſe*; and *that God deſign'd all Mankind ſhou'd at all Times know what he wills them to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe.* Now any one that really believes this, cannot poſſibly regard all Opinions as alike indifferent. He muſt believe that ſome Principles are of great Importance, and muſt therefore, if he acts conſiſtently, be ſollicitous to maintain and promote thoſe Principles, which he thinks it is the Will of God we ſhould know, believe, and profeſs, and to diſcourage and prevent the ſpreading of ſuch Principles as he thinks are contrary to them, and ſubverſive of them.

Accordingly,

Accordingly, when he is giving an Account of what thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity may eaſily know, concerning the Duty they owe to God, he asks, " can't they tell what Sen-" timents inſpire them with Love and Reve-" rence for the Deity? and need they much " Reflection to know, that the more any " Sentiments do this, the more they ought " to be cheriſh'd? and that as they ought " themſelves to have the higheſt Ideas of Love " and Veneration for their Creator and Bene-" factor, ſo they ſhould, on all proper Occaſi-" ons endeavour to excite the ſame in others? " And that as they cannot but think it wou'd " be in them affronting God to offer him a " Worſhip which they believe he abhors, ſo " they muſt think it the ſame in others? p. " 280." This is ſtrongly expreſs'd to ſignify, that the Law of Nature it ſelf obliges all Mankind, even thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities, to cheriſh thoſe Notions which they find inſpire them with Love and Veneration for the Deity, and to endeavour to excite the ſame Sentiments in others; and conſequently to uſe all proper Endeavours in their Power to ſpread and propagate thoſe Notions. And when he adds, that " as they cannot but ſee that it " wou'd be in them affronting God, to offer " him a Worſhip which they believe he ab-" hors, ſo they muſt think it the ſame in o-" thers:" The natural Conſequence of this, is, that they muſt endeavour by all proper Means in their Power, to prevent others affronting him as well as themſelves. And now,

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is not this Scheme of the Author's, chargeable with all thoſe Conſequences he lays upon others? Might it not be ſaid with equal Juſtice, that "this is a Notion which lays a "Foundation for everlaſting Perſecution, ſince "it will oblige Men, as they love their Chil-"dren, Families, Friends, Neighbours, and "Relations, to uſe any Means, come into a-"ny perſecuting Meaſures, to prevent ſuch "Opinions from ſpreading, as they imagine "would deprive them of that Degree of Hap-"pineſs, which otherwiſe they might ever "enjoy?"

Thus might the Author's Charge of countenancing Perſecution be eaſily turn'd upon himſelf. Indeed the Method which he ſeems here to propoſe as the only effectual Remedy againſt it, *viz.* the looking upon no Principles whatſoever as of any Importance to Happineſs, is both plainly inconſiſtent with what he himſelf advances in other Paſſages of his Book, as hath been now ſhewn, and is in itſelf abſolutely impracticable. It appears that the true Deiſt as well as the Chriſtian, muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe ſome Principles to be of great Importance, and the contrary ones to be of a pernicious Tendency. Nor can the Atheiſt himſelf admit all Principles or Opinions to be equal, with regard to their Influence on human Happineſs. He muſt look upon the Doctrines of a governing Providence, and a State of future Retributions, to lay a Foundation for all kind of Bigotry, and the worſt of Evils, Superſtition, and therefore to be contrary to the

Happineſs of Mankind, and that his own Scheme is the only way to free them from needleſs Anxieties and Terrors; and accordingly, there have been Atheiſts as zealous to propagate their own Opinions, as any Set of Men whatſoever. Thus the Author whilſt he pretends to be ſuch an Enemy to Perſecution, propoſes no other Remedy for avoiding it, but what is on every Suppoſition impracticable, and can never take Effect.

Yea, he ſeems to me to juſtify that Principle which has been the true Source of Perſecution in every Age, and that is, that it is lawful and juſt to uſe any Methods, or come into any Meaſures whatſoever, to propagate thoſe Principles that are of Importance to human Happineſs, and to hinder and ſuppreſs thoſe Principles that are of a pernicious Tendency. This is evident from what he ſays in the Paſſage before cited, where ſpeaking of Men's having a Notion, that ſome Principles are of great Importance to their obtaining a higher Happineſs, he adds, that this *will oblige them*, as they love their Families, Friends, Neighbours, *to uſe any Means, come into any perſecuting Meaſures*, to prevent ſuch Opinions from ſpreading, as they imagine, wou'd deprive them of that Degree of Happineſs, which otherwiſe they might ever enjoy, p. 412. And elſewhere, ſpeaking of thoſe that ſuppoſe ſome Doctrines to be neceſſary to Salvation, he ſaith, " if they think ſuch Things neceſſary " to Salvation, *they muſt ſuppoſe it their* " *Duty* to uſe ſuch Means as will *moſt effectually*

" *ally* ſerve that purpoſe, and that God in re-
" quiring the End, requires all thoſe Means
" that will beſt ſecure and propagate it, p.
" 151." Where he ſeems to think, that ſuppoſing the Premiſes true, that there are Doctrines neceſſary, and which it is the Will of God they ſhould believe, the Concluſion is juſt, that they may, nay *they ought, they muſt ſuppoſe it their Duty* to uſe any Means to propagate them, that they think will be moſt *effectual*; and particularly he ſhews, that they muſt in this Caſe think it their Duty to uſe Force, or violent Methods to *prevent damnable Opinions from ſpreading*, p. 155. And that they muſt uſe Fraud too, to *deceive Men for their eternal Good*, and *hinder them from imbibing poiſonous Doctrines*, p. 157.

I don't ſee therefore, but that if this Gentleman can bring himſelf to think, that there are ſome Principles of great Importance to the Happineſs of Mankind, (and he plainly ſuppoſes, that the Principles he himſelf has advanc'd in his Book are ſuch,) and that there are other Principles of a very pernicious Influence and Tendency, (and this Charge he often advances againſt the Principles of thoſe whom he thinks fit to oppoſe, and indeed of all that ſtand up for an external Revelation,) I don't ſee but upon this view, he may think it lawful, and even his Duty, to uſe any Means, or come into any Meaſures whatſoever, that may be moſt effectual to propagate the one, and hinder the ſpreading of the other. That

his Principles wou'd allow him to uſe Fraud for ſo good an End, none can doubt, that conſiders the Doctrine he advances, that Truth is to be judg'd by it's Tendency, that Falſhood is lawful and even a Duty when it tends to the publick Good, yea, and even to our own private Benefit, and that it is lawful to deceive Men for their Advantage. He often bitterly inveighs againſt the pious Frauds of Eccleſiaſticks, and yet he and they agree in the Principle, only they differ in the Application of it; becauſe they probably thought many Things to be for the Good of others, which he does not think ſo; but why might they not act according to their Perſuaſion, as well as he according to his? And indeed, if we may judge by the many unfair Quotations, and plain Miſrepreſentations of the Senſe of Adverſaries, with many other Arts little reconcileable to Truth or Candour, ſo uſual with this Writer and other Fellow-Labourers in the ſame Cauſe, they ſeem to think any Methods lawful, though never ſo unfair and diſingenuous, in order to obtain their End, the weakning or deſtroying the Authority of divine Revelation. Nor am I ſure that he would ſcruple Force any more than Fraud for ſo good an End. That ſtrange Spirit of Bitterneſs, which notwithſtanding the fair Semblance of Moderation he puts on, ſo often diſcovers it ſelf in his Book, might for ought I know, carry him to the Extreams of Rage and Violence; and ſince he advances it as a Maxim, that the Goodneſs of Actions is to be meaſur'd wholly by the

Tendency

Tendency of them, I don't know but he might think violent Methods in ſome Caſes good and neceſſary for ſo valuable an End. Indeed when I conſider that he finds fault with that Precept of our Saviour that teaches us to love our Enemies, and that he urges it as our Duty to hate ill Men, not meerly their Actions but their Perſons, p. 342. when I conſider that he repreſents the Clergy, and all thoſe that are for poſitive Precepts in Religion, that is, almoſt all Chriſtians in all Ages as *Demoniſts*, and worſe than Atheiſts, and Divines in all Ages, as for the moſt part *mortal Enemies to the Exerciſe of Reaſon*, and *below Brutes*, p. 277, 278. I muſt own that the Spirit of this Author ſeems to me to be ſo contrary to the mild and gentle Spirit of the Goſpel, that I ſhou'd be loth ſuch as he had it in their Power to do what their Inclinations might prompt 'em to, againſt the Profeſſors of Chriſtianity. I am apt to think that all thoſe who are zealous for the Authority of the Scriptures, wou'd paſs for the Advocates of a falſe and pernicious Superſtition; and Superſtition is worſe in this Gentleman's Opinion than Atheiſm. I am not certain therefore, but he might perſuade himſelf that it was for the publick Good to baniſh or deſtroy them.

Upon the whole, I don't ſee any Neceſſity we are under to have recourſe to this Author in order to our being deliver'd from Perſecution, and to our being brought to a friendly Diſpoſition towards one another. I think the Goſpel has a much happier Tendency this way, than the Scheme of Principles he wou'd introduce.

Thoſe

Thoſe that govern themſelves by its Principles and Precepts, however zealous they may be by all Methods conſiſtent with Truth, Humanity, and Charity, to ſpread thoſe Doctrines which they cannot but believe to be of great Importance, yet will never allow themſelves to uſe any Methods either of Fraud or Violence for ſo excellent an End; their Zeal will be pure and peaceable, free from all Bitterneſs and Guile; nor will they ever think it lawful for them to *do Evil that Good may come of it*, a Maxim abſolutely condemn'd by the Goſpel, though there is Reaſon to think that it is not altogether diſapprov'd by the Author, who is for having the Goodneſs of Actions meaſur'd wholly by their Tendency.

If as he tells us, "there's no Part of natu-"ral Religion but what highly tends to improve "a ſocial and benign Temper, p. 405." 'Tis undeniably evident, that nothing can have a greater Tendency to form the Minds of Men to a kind, benign, benevolent Diſpoſition, than the Goſpel of Jeſus. It not only confirms all that natural Religion ſuggeſts on this Head, but furniſhes many additional Motives, the ſtrongeſt that can be conceiv'd. It every where breaths univerſal Benevolence and Good-will towards Mankind, and allows us not (what this Gentleman thinks the Law of Nature allows us) to *hate* even *our Enemies*. When therefore after having commended natural Religion for its Tendency to improve this benign Temper, he immediately adds, that "what in moſt Places paſ-"ſes for the Chriſtian Religion, has transform'd

"this

" this benign Creature into one fierce and cruel,
" and made him act with ſuch Rage and Fury,
" againſt thoſe who never did him the leaſt In-
" jury, as cou'd not have entred into the
" Hearts of Men, even though they were in
" the Doctor's unavoidable State of Degene-
" racy and Corruption;" 'tis obſervable, that he dare not ſay the *Chriſtian Religion* it ſelf as laid down in the Goſpel, but *what in moſt Places paſſes for the Chriſtian Religion* has had this Effect. Why then did he not, when he had ſo fair an Opportunity, take this Occaſion to acknowledge the admirable Tendency the Goſpel hath to cultivate and improve this kind and benign Diſpoſition? Why did he not endeavour to recover Men to the true original Spirit of Chriſtianity, and to that End ingage them to read and ſtudy their Bibles, and to take their Religion from thence, and govern themſelves by the excellent Principles and Precepts of the Goſpel? As to his Inſinuation, that the Rage and Fury that Chriſtians have fallen into *cou'd not have entred into the Hearts of Men, even though they were in the Doctor's unavoidable State of Corruption and Degeneracy*, I wou'd only ask, what does he think of the Heathen Perſecutions? Did not they ſet the execrable Pattern of perſecuting for Conſcience-ſake? Though it muſt be own'd this has been improv'd upon ſince; the Art of Perſecution, like other Things, gathering Strength by long Practice. The Practice of putting Perſons to Death for Conſcience-ſake, did not obtain among Chriſtians till the Purity of the Chriſtian

Chriſtian Doctrine was in a great meaſure loſt; it came to its Height under the Papal Uſurpation, which is the greateſt Corruption of the Chriſtian Religion, and it was chiefly in Defence of Pagan Idolatries and Superſtitions, though cloath'd with a Chriſtian Name, that thoſe Cruelties and Perſecutions have been practis'd. And it is very hard that Chriſtianity ſhou'd be made accountable for Practices that are manifeſtly owing to Men's Deviation from it, and moſt directly contrary to the Spirit and Genius of the Goſpel. If Men cou'd but be perſuaded to govern themſelves by the excellent Principles and Precepts of Chriſtianity, this wou'd be the moſt effectual Way to produce that new and glorious Face of Things, that Heaven upon Earth, which this Gentleman ſpeaks of, to extinguiſh all Hatred and Revenge, and introduce a univerſal Benevolence and brotherly Affection. But if the Goſpel, which every where breaths a Spirit of Love and Goodneſs, which propoſes the moſt admirable Precepts of Benevolence and Charity, and inforces them by the moſt powerful and ingaging Motives, and ſets before us a living Example of the moſt conſummate Love to Mankind in the Son of God in our Nature, if this can't extinguiſh Animoſities, nor ingage Men to mutual Love, I am afraid the Author's Scheme will never do it. Shall he who allows us to hate our Enemies, to avenge Injuries, *&c.* be thought a greater Promoter of Peace and Charity, of Benevolence and Good-will towards Mankind, than he that requires us to love our Enemies,

to

to do good to them that hate us and despitefully use us, and forgive those that have injur'd us? no more than he can be accounted a greater Friend to the sacred Interests of Truth, who allows Men to lie and to deceive when they think it for their Benefit to do so, than he who commands us to lie not at all, and not to do Evil that Good may come of it.

I have now finish'd my Remarks on this Author's Scheme; and now I may leave it to the Reader whether it deserves all those glorious Encomiums he himself is pleas'd to bestow upon it. He tells us in his Preface, that "he "has laid down such plain and evident Rules, "as may enable Men of the meanest Capacity, "to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; and has represented the former in "every Part so beautiful, so amiable, and so "strongly affecting, that they who in the least "reflect, must be highly in love with it.

And he concludes his Book with a Panegyrick on his own Performance. That by this Attempt of his, "as nothing but Rubbish is "remov'd, nothing but what is either inconsistent with, or at least takes off from the full "Exercise of Piety and Virtue; so every thing "is advanc'd which tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Happiness of human "Societies, p. 421." That "there is none "who wish well to Mankind, but must also "wish his Hypothesis to be true; and there "cannot be a greater Proof of its Truth, than "that it is in all its Parts so exactly calculated "for the Good of Mankind, that either to add

" to or take from it, will be to their manifeſt " Prejudice, p. 422." That " the Religion " he teaches is moſt worthy of God, moſt " friendly to Society, moſt helpful to Govern- " ment, and moſt beneficial to every Indivi- " dual; that it is a Religion, as he hopes he " has fully prov'd, founded upon ſuch demon- " ſtrable Principles, as are obvious to the " meaneſt Capacity; and moſt effectually pre- " vents the Growth both of Scepticiſm and " Enthuſiaſm." And he concludes his Book with declaring, that " he is ready to give up " his Hypotheſis, if another can be nam'd, " attended with fewer Difficulties, and that if " he has advanc'd any Notion which does not " *naturally* and *neceſſarily* ſhew it ſelf to be " the Will of God, by tending to promote his " Honour and the Good of Men, he is wil- " ling intirely to renounce it, and by not per- " ſiſting to defend Error, to give this uncom- " mon Mark of an ingenuous Diſpoſition, *Er- " rare poſſum, Hæreticus eſſe nolo.*

How far the Author may think himſelf o- blig'd to put theſe Profeſſions in Practice, to ſhew his Ingenuity and Candor, I cannot pre- tend to tell; but I think it has been ſhewn, that ſome of the Notions he has advanc'd are neither for the Honour of God nor for the Good of Mankind. I cannot but think it highly dero- gatory to the Honour of God to aſſert, as this Writer does, that it wou'd be Tyranny in God to command us in any thing, which taken abſo- lutely and in general is of an indifferent Nature, or to inſtitute any poſitive Rites in his own

Worſhip;

Worſhip; and that we are not oblig'd to obey him in any Inſtance, except we ſee that that very Thing has a natural Tendency to promote our own Intereſt; which is not to allow him as great a Power over his Creatures, as earthly Parents and Maſters have over their Children and Servants. Nor can I ſee how he can juſtly pretend to conſult the Honour of God, who ridicules thoſe that talk of the Dignity of the divine Government, and repreſents him as perfectly unconcern'd, as to what regards his own Authority, whether his Laws be obſerv'd or not; or who leads Men to think that though they do not render God any immediate Worſhip at all, provided they apply themſelves to ſocial Duties, they anſwer the End of their Being, and do all that God requires; which is under Pretence of high Notions of God's Perfection and Happineſs in himſelf to compliment him out of the World, and make it unneceſſary to have any immediate Regard to him at all in Religion.

The Author's Scheme appears to me, to be as little for the Good of Mankind as for the Honour of God. It has been ſhewn, that whilſt he pretends a mighty Zeal for Virtue, he in effect deprives it of ſome of its ſtrongeſt Supports and moſt powerful Motives, and takes away the moſt effectual Reſtraints from Vice; that his Scheme tends to weaken the Hopes and Joys of good Men, and to deliver the Wicked from the Terrors of divine Judgment, (though it is for the Good of the World that ſuch Perſons ſhou'd be ſtill kept under the Power of thoſe Terrors) and to make Men look upon Sin

as a ſlight and inconſiderable Evil. He pretends to deliver Men from Superſtition, but takes away the Authority of the Scriptures, which is the moſt effectual Remedy againſt it; and tho' he will not allow God to inſtitute any poſitive Rites in his own Worſhip, of which he is undoubtedly the propereſt Judge, yet he leaves Men at full Liberty to follow their own Inventions in this Matter, which in all Ages has been the moſt fruitful Source of the moſt abſurd Superſtitions. He inveighs vehemently againſt Perſecution, yet he ſeems to allow that which has been the great Principle of Perſecution in all Ages, and that is, that provided Men do but think any Opinions to be of Conſequence to human Happineſs, (which it is impoſſible in many Caſes to help thinking) they are oblig'd, even by Charity it ſelf, to uſe any Means, or come into any perſecuting Meaſures to promote them, and to hinder the contrary Opinions from ſpreading. He pretends a great Love to Truth, and Zeal againſt pious Frauds, and yet he lays down Principles which diſſolve the Obligations of Truth and Faith among Men, and give free Scope to Falſhood and Deceit; which is of the worſt Conſequence to human Society. He gives a large Indulgence to Men's Appetites and Paſſions, leaving Men to gratify them as far as they themſelves think reaſonable, or moſt for their own Happineſs in the Circumſtances they are in, without any other divine Law to reſtrain and govern them.

His Scheme is not only contrary to the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind, but in

in all its Parts inconſiſtent with it ſelf. What he offers to prove the abſolute Perfection of the Law of Nature, is inconſiſtent with its ſuppos'd Clearneſs to all Mankind; and what he offers to ſhew that it is abſolutely clear and known in all its Extent to all Mankind, leaves no room for the Plea of Sincerity, which yet he ſometimes lays ſo great a Streſs upon, as an Excuſe for Miſtakes and Errors in Religion. He frequently praiſes the Philoſophers, and ſuppoſes their Writings may be of ſignal Uſe to give Men clearer Notions of their Duty and of the Law of Nature, and yet will not allow, that a Revelation from God can be of any Uſe at all, to render the Religion of Nature clearer to any Man, than it is to all Men without it. He often ſuppoſes, that all Men have an equal Light given them, that the Light of Nature is equally clear to all, and equally diſcoverable by all, the Illiterate as well as the Learned, and yet in other Places, talks of Men's knowing the Law of Nature, and diſcovering the Will of God, *as far as their Circumſtances permit*, which ſuppoſes, that all Men have not equal Means and Advantages for knowing and diſcovering that Law. He raiſes a mighty Clamour againſt thoſe that ſuppoſe the Heathen World to have been in a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy, though they ſuppoſe this originally owing to their own Fault, and yet he himſelf ſuppoſes them and all Mankind, in all Ages, (all but the *free-thinking Few*) to have been involv'd in Superſtition, which he looks upon as the worſt State Mankind

kind can be in, and this too as the Effect of an original Weakneſs in the human Nature. And whilſt he ſets up for vindicating the Right of the Heathens to Happineſs, he advances ſuch a Scheme, as if true, wou'd prove that there ſcarce was ſuch a Thing as a ſincere *well-meaning Gentile* for many Ages, all chargeable with counteracting the cleareſt univerſal Light, and therefore all deſtitute of that Sincerity which he makes to be the only Title to Happineſs. He ſometimes makes the Doctrine of future Retributions a Part of the Deiſt's Creed, and of great Uſe to make Men good and in love with their Duty; at other Times he diſcards all this as mean and ſervile, deſtroying the Merit of Men's Services; ſo that the true Deiſt ſometimes, is one that believes future Rewards and Puniſhments, at other Times, one that has no Regard to any ſuch Thing. He frequently makes a Man's own Happineſs and Intereſt the only Meaſure of his Obedience, and that no Man can be oblig'd to any Thing but what ſome way or other contributes to his own Advantage; at other Times he ſets up for a diſintereſted Virtue, without any Regard to a Man's own Intereſt and Happineſs at all. He ſometimes talks of the Duties we owe to God, as diſtinct from thoſe we owe to our Neighbours and our ſelves, and in many other Places repreſents the Duties we owe to our Neighbours, as the whole of Religion, and all that God requires. He often talks of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, and yet according to him, there are no fix'd unchangeable Rules of Morality

Morality at all; the Goodneſs of Actions is to be wholly meaſur'd by their Tendency, and this is to be judg'd by the Circumſtances a Man is under, which Circumſtances, he ſays, are continually changing. He frequently ſuppoſes, that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is neceſſary, and that this is the one true Religion which all have been ever bound to believe, know, profeſs, and practiſe; and yet at other Times, he ſuppoſes that there are no Principles at all neceſſary to be believ'd and profeſs'd, or to be regarded as of Importance to human Happineſs, and ſeems to recommend an univerſal Indifferency to all Religion.

I think I may now leave it to the Reader, whether the civil Epithet he beſtows upon the Scheme of the Advocates for Revelation, be not much more juſtly applicable to his own, that it is a *ſelf-confounding Scheme*; and whether the Charge he advances againſt the learned Dr. *Clark*, that he introduces *univerſal Scepticiſm*, p. 381, 382. may not be very properly turn'd upon himſelf, who ſeems ſcarce to have any fixed Principles at all, but is continually fluctuating, ſubverting in one Part of his Book, what he affirms in another? This Author's Attempt is a new Proof of the miſerable Shifts the Enemies of Chriſtianity are reduc'd to, and that whilſt they endeavour to deſtroy the Authority of Revelation, they do really confound themſelves. The Scheme which he has dreſſed up with ſo much Art and Care in Oppoſition to Chriſtianity, however plauſible it may ſeem to be at firſt View, appears

pears upon a nearer Examination to be inconſiſtent with Reaſon and with it ſelf. I have not ſo mean an Opinion of the Author's Abilities, as to think this is owing to his own Want of Capacity; he has done it to as much Advantage, as the Cauſe he had undertaken wou'd admit; though one wou'd have expected, that when he is pretending to deſcribe a Religion, which he ſuppoſes to be ſo very obvious to all Mankind, and which it is the Will of God all Men ſhou'd believe, know, profeſs, and practiſe, the Account given of it ſhou'd be clear, eaſy, and conſiſtent. I think it may be concluded from his Book, what wretched Uncertainties we muſt be reduc'd to, as to many of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature it ſelf, and what little Security we cou'd have of its being long maintain'd amongſt us, if the Chriſtian Revelation were diſcarded; and that therefore all that have a true Concern for the Honour of God, for the Good of Mankind, and for the Cauſe of Virtue in the World, ſhou'd have a high Eſteem for the Chriſtian Religion, to which alone truly belong thoſe Epithets, which the Author vain-gloriouſly attributes to his own Hypotheſis, that it is moſt friendly to Society, moſt helpful to Government, and moſt beneficial to every Individual.

APPEN-

APPENDIX.

Whether and how far we are oblig'd by the Law of Nature, to believe Things above Reason.

BEFORE I leave this first Part of the Answer, relating to the Account this Author gives of the Law of Nature, it may not be improper to consider, whether the Law of Nature it self, obliges us to believe any Propositions concerning Things above Reason. There are several Things in his Book which lead us to consider this Question, which therefore I have chosen to consider distinctly, especially, as what may be offer'd on this Head, may be of no small Use for obviating some of the principal Objections, this Writer makes against the Doctrines of Revelation.

Our Author seems in several Parts of his Book, to deny that the Law or Religion of Nature can at all extend to Things above Reason. As he sets up our Reason for a sovereign Judge in all Things, so his View seems to be to shew that we are never to believe any Thing, which we our selves are not able to explain and to ac-

count for. Thus he asks, " Can the eternal " Reaſon of Things extend to Things that do " not belong to Reaſon, or as Divines ſpeak, " are above Reaſon, p. 367." And more particularly in his 12th Chapter, p. 222. He ſets himſelf to prove, that *there are not in Religion Propoſitions to be believ'd which are above Reaſon*; he ought to have ſaid, *Propoſitions concerning Things which are above Reaſon.* He argues, " if I don't underſtand the Terms " of a Propoſition, or if they are inconſiſt- " ent with one another, or ſo uncertain that " I know not what Meaning to fix on them, " here is nothing told me, and conſequently " no room for Belief. But in all Caſes where " I am capable of underſtanding a Propoſiti- " on, 'tis Reaſon muſt inform me, whether " it is certain, probable, or uncertain." And again, " it is impoſſible to believe, when we " know not what it is we are to believe, or to " believe an abſurd or contradictory Propoſi- " tion, yet becauſe People may be brought to " fancy they believe ſuch Things, therefore " deſigning Men, whoſe Intereſt it is to con- " found Men's Underſtandings, have craftily " invented the Notion of believing Things " above Reaſon." He adds, " that here the " Ravings of an Enthuſiaſt are on a Level " with the Dictates of infinite Wiſdom, and " Nonſenſe render'd moſt ſacred." From whence he concludes, " that if the Scripture " was deſign'd to be underſtood, it muſt be " within the Reach of human Underſtanding, " and conſequently, can't contain Propoſiti-

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"ons above or below human Underſtand-
"ing.

I ſhall not at preſent inquire, whether the Scripture-Revelation contains any Propoſitions relating to Things above Reaſon, which we are bound to believe, but conſider the general Queſtion as far as the Law or Religion of Nature is concern'd in it; whether in the Religion of Nature there are not ſome Propoſitions to be believ'd concerning Things above Reaſon. And in treating of this Queſtion I ſhall firſt inquire, whether there are Things above Reaſon, that is, above *our* Reaſon; for this is the Point to be conſider'd: And then, whether there are Propoſitions relating to Things above our Reaſon, which we are oblig'd by the Religion or Law of Nature to believe.

As to the firſt, that there are Things above our Reaſon, that is, which tranſcend our Comprehenſion or Capacity, at leaſt at preſent, and which, though true and certain in themſelves, are attended with Difficulties, which we are not able to explain or to account for, is as evident as it is, that our Faculties or Reaſon in their preſent State, are of a very narrow and limited Extent. There is nothing more common than this way of ſpeaking, that ſuch or ſuch Things are above a Man's Capacity. And in this reſpect, Things may be ſaid to be above the Reaſon or Underſtanding of a Child, which are yet plain and eaſy to a Man; Things may be above the Underſtanding or Capacity of one Man, which are not above another's; as to comprehend

many of Sir *Iſaac Newton*'s Demonſtrations, the Reaſons of State, the Policy of Kingdoms, may in many Caſes be above the Reaſon and Capacity of the Vulgar, and of which they are incompetent Judges; many Things may be above our Reaſon or Comprehenſion at preſent, which ſhall not be ſo in a future State; and ſome Things, perhaps, may be always above our Reach, which are not above the Underſtanding or Capacity of an Angel; and conſequently, Difficulties which appear to us inſuperable, may appear plain and eaſy to Beings of a ſuperior Order, and whoſe Underſtandings and Capacities are of a larger Extent than ours. And there are many Things above the Reach and Comprehenſion of all created Beings, which yet are plain and obvious to the infinite Underſtanding of God himſelf. All this is I think too evident to be denied; and that therefore there are Things above our Reaſon, by which is meant, no more than Things that exceed our Capacity, and which, though true and certain in themſelves, we are not able to explain or to account for.

This muſt be own'd by all that will not take upon them to affirm, that our Minds are of ſo vaſt an Extent that there is nothing in the whole Compaſs of Things, but what we can clearly comprehend and are competent Judges of; an Aſſertion ſo abſurd, that I need not take any Pains to diſprove or expoſe it. Yet our Author often talks as if this was his Sentiment. He asks, "How can the eternal Reaſon of Things "extend to Things that do not belong to Rea-

"ſon,

"ſon, or as Divines love to ſpeak, are above "Reaſon?" [that is, above *our* Reaſon] as if the whole eternal Reaſon of Things were known to us in its full Extent, or as if there were nothing relating to the Reaſon and Nature of Things throughout the Univerſe, that tranſcends our Capacity, or which we are not able to account for. Particularly he ſometimes expreſſes himſelf as if he thought, that all the Ways of God, and the Methods and Meaſures of infinite Wiſdom, are within the Reach of our Underſtanding or Capacity. He tells us, p. 191. that "God cannot otherwiſe "witneſs for himſelf, or aſſert the Wiſdom "and Goodneſs of his Conduct, than by ſub-"mitting his Ways to Men's cool Delibera-"tion and ſtrict Examination; ſince 'tis from "the Marks we diſcern in the Laws of the Uni-"verſe and its Government, that we can de-"monſtrate it to be govern'd by a God of in-"finite Wiſdom and Goodneſs." But certainly though it be very true that we ſee numberleſs Evidences of Wiſdom and Goodneſs in the Frame and in the Government of the Univerſe, from whence we may conclude that Things were made and diſpos'd by an infinitely wiſe and good Being; yet it is alſo equally true, that there are many Things in the Frame and Government of the World, many of the Phænomena of Nature and Providence which we are not able to account for, and the Reaſons and Ends of which we are not able to aſſign. And the Conduct that Reaſon directs to in ſuch a Caſe is this, that ſince we plainly ſee ſuch bright and

and ſtrong Evidences of Wiſdom and Goodneſs in many of the Works that we behold, and the more we know of them the more we ſee cauſe to admire the Wiſdom and Beauty of the Contrivance, ſince the whole Frame of Things in general bears ſuch Impreſſions of Wiſdom and Goodneſs as lead us to a moſt wiſe and good and powerful Cauſe of all Things; then where we do not at preſent ſee the Reaſons of Things, (as in many Caſes we do not) we muſt ſtill believe they are moſt wiſely and juſtly order'd, as well as where we do ſee the Reaſons of 'em, and muſt aſcribe the ſeeming Irregularity to the Darkneſs of our own Minds, and the Narrowneſs of our own Comprehenſion. I cannot therefore excuſe this Author from an unwarrantable Preſumption in ſaying, that "God "cannot otherwiſe witneſs for himſelf, or aſ- "ſert the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of his Con- "duct, than by ſubmitting his Ways to Men's "cool Deliberation and ſtrict Examination." As if we were in all Caſes proper Judges of what God does in the Government of the Univerſe, and of the Reaſons infinite Wiſdom may have for taking ſuch Meaſures or proceeding in ſuch a Courſe; or as if he were always oblig'd to acquaint us with the Reaſons of his Procedure, or elſe muſt be content to ſuffer his Wiſdom and Goodneſs to be arraign'd and vilified. This Writer indeed produces ſome Paſſages of Scripture, in which God condeſcends to appeal to Men themſelves concerning the Wiſdom and Equity of his Ways and Dealings, p. 194. and it will eaſily be own'd, that in many Caſes the Reaſons

Reaſons of his Procedure are ſo plain and obvious that all Men may ſee and judge of them. But the ſame Scripture aſſures us, that *as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, ſo are his Ways and Thoughts above ours*; that *we know but Part of his Ways*; and that *his Ways are often in the dark Waters, and his Footſteps are not known*; and that though God *is righteous in all his Ways, and holy in all he doeth*, yet his *Judgments* are often *unſearcheable, and his Ways paſt finding out*; and that we cannot by *ſearching find out God, we cannot find out the Almighty unto Perfection.* And this every Man muſt own, that has a juſt Notion either of God or of himſelf. 'Tis certain we know very little of the Laws by which he governs the natural and moral World; there are numberleſs Things relating both to the infinite Nature of God himſelf, and to his glorious Attributes and Perfections, and to the Methods of his Providence, *&c.* which we are not able to account for; and no Wonder, ſince through the Narrowneſs of our Minds we are not able to form a clear and adequate Idea of Things infinite and eternal, nor are we able to carry our Views at once through all the Parts of the Univerſe, nor conſequently to ſee Things in their various Tendencies and Subſerviencies, and in their proper Beauty and Harmony, and the Reſpect they bear to the Whole. Nor can I imagine to my ſelf a more ridiculous Sight, than a poor ſorry Creature who is puzzled with every thing about him, who knows not how his own Body and Soul are united, or

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how he himſelf moves and ſees and feels, or the Manner of Operation of his own Imagination, Memory, *&c.* yet pretending to ſo vaſt a Comprehenſion, as to be a proper Judge in all Caſes of the Nature and Ways of God himſelf, and the Reaſons of the divine Proceedings; ſo that he will not allow any thing to be juſt or wiſe, except he can clearly diſcern it to be ſo, or that there cou'd be a Reaſon for any thing if he does not ſee it. Our Author mentions *Job*'s deſiring *to reaſon with God*, Job 13. 3. But he ſhou'd alſo have taken notice of his Submiſſion. That holy Man who in the Agonies of his Grief dropp'd ſome Expreſſions that did not ſhew all the Submiſſion and Veneration that became a Creature towards God, yet upon a Diſplay of the divine Majeſty, and the Incomprehenſibleneſs of his Ways, humbly acknowledg'd his Error and Preſumption, in preſuming raſhly to judge of Things ſo far above his Reach, as the Works and Ways of the Moſt High; a Conduct which I wiſh this Gentleman wou'd follow, who talks as pertly all along, as if his Underſtanding were of ſo vaſt an Extent, that God cou'd have no Reaſon for doing any thing but he muſt know it. But certainly it is a juſt Homage we owe to the moſt wiſe and righteous Governor of the World (and which he juſtly requires of his reaſonable Creatures) to believe the Wiſdom and Equity of his Conduct, even where we cannot diſtinctly account for it; in ſuch Caſes to ſubmit our Reaſon to God's, that is, to believe that God is wiſer than we are, and that he has moſt juſt Reaſons for every thing he

he does, though we are not able to ſee them, is a Duty preſcrib'd us by the Law of Nature it ſelf.

And this will clear our way to the next Thing I propos'd to conſider, and that is, whether ſince there are Things above Reaſon, there may be Propoſitions relating to Things above Reaſon, which we are oblig'd by the Law or Religion of Nature to believe. This is neceſſary to be inquir'd into; for perhaps it might be ſaid, that though there are Things above our Reaſon or Capacity to comprehend, we need not concern our ſelves about them, and are under no Obligation to believe any thing concerning them. But I think it may be eaſily ſhewn, that we are in ſome Caſes as much oblig'd to believe Propoſitions concerning Things of this kind, as concerning any Things whatſoever; and that in ſuch Caſes not to believe them, meerly becauſe of the Difficulties attending them which we are not able to account for, is an unreaſonable Conduct, and contrary to the Law of Nature. And to ſhew this, I need only take this Writer's own Account of the Religion of Nature, that "*it is the Belief of the* "*Exiſtence of a God, and the Senſe and* "*Practice of thoſe Duties, which reſult* "*from the Knowledge we by our Reaſon* "*have of God and his Perfections, and of* "*our ſelves and our own Imperfections.*" Now if the Religion of Nature includes the Belief of the Exiſtence of God and of his Perfections, then it includes the Belief of Things that are above our Reaſon in the Senſe already

explain'd. But this will be render'd plainer by mentioning ſome particular Inſtances.

Thus, *e. g.* it is an Article of natural Religion, and which I am bound to believe, that God is eternal, or exiſts from everlaſting to everlaſting; yet when I ſet my ſelf to conceive Eternity, I am ſoon confounded, and whatever Hypotheſis I chuſe, meet with Difficulties which I am not able to explain. I am alſo bound to believe that God is immenſe, or every where preſent, though what kind of Preſence this is, or after what manner he is preſent, I cannot explain or account for. I believe for very good Reaſons that God knows all Things, and that he fore-knows future Contingencies; but the Manner how he does ſo I am not able to deſcribe. And I believe that God's Preſcience and Man's Free-agency are perfectly conſiſtent with one another, though it has puzzled ſome of the moſt penetrating Wits in all Ages how to reconcile them. I believe that God created the World, though the Manner of his doing it is above my Comprehenſion.

And with reſpect to the Methods of divine Providence; it is certain that God permits Sin and Miſery, that he ſuffers Mankind to fall into a very degenerate State, and the greateſt Part of 'em in all Ages, to be over-run with Barbariſm and Superſtition. Yea, this Author believes that God made human Nature with an original Foible or Weakneſs, that makes Men liable to be practis'd on, and expoſes them in all Ages, an eaſy Prey to Impoſtors. It is alſo certain in Fact, that though he be the common

Parent

Parent of all Mankind, yet he remarkably distinguishes some of the human Race, yea some whole Nations above others, and gives them much greater Advantages for their Improvement in Knowledge and Virtue, and consequently in Happiness. Now the Ends and Reasons of these Things we are in a great measure unacquainted with, and not able to account for, and therefore these may be justly said to be Things above our Reason or Comprehension, at least at present, till we obtain a fuller and more comprehensive View of Things, which perhaps we may have in a future State. Yet there are Propositions concerning these Things, which we are bound to believe; *e. g.* we are oblig'd to believe that God's permitting Sin and Misery, his giving some of the human Race much greater Advantages for Improvement than others, is most wise and just and reasonable, though we can't clearly comprehend or penetrate into the Reasons of it.

And this is a Duty necessarily incumbent upon us from the Law of Nature it self, according to the Definition our Author gives of it, and which has been mention'd above, *viz.* that *it is the Sense and Practice of those Duties, which result from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of God and his Perfections, and of our selves and our own Imperfections.* For it is a Duty becoming such short-sighted imperfect Creatures towards the supreme and infinitely perfect Being, to believe that whatever Method of Procedure he takes is perfectly wise and just and good, though the Reasons and Ends

upon which he proceeds are Things above our Reach, and what we are not at preſent able to account for.

Thus it appears, that there are Propoſitions concerning Things above our Reaſon or Comprehenſion, which yet we are oblig'd by the Law of Nature to believe; and he that ſhou'd refuſe to believe ſuch Things for no other Reaſon, but becauſe there are Difficulties attending them, which he cannot ſolve, and becauſe he cannot explain how theſe Things are ſo; *e. g.* he that ſhou'd refuſe to believe that God is eternal, becauſe he cannot form a clear and conſiſtent Notion of Eternity; he that ſhou'd refuſe to believe that God is every where preſent, becauſe what kind of Preſence this is, or how he is every where preſent he is not able to conceive; or that ſhou'd not believe that God knows our Thoughts, or fore-knows future Contingencies, or that he created the World out of nothing, that is, gave Being to that which had none before, meerly becauſe he has no Notion of the Manner how theſe Things cou'd be done, wou'd act a moſt abſurd and unreaſonable Part, contrary to the Law of Nature, and which wou'd terminate in downright Atheiſm. And the Atheiſt believes Things ſtill more incomprehenſible than theſe, and which indeed are infinitely abſurd.

Let us now examine what our Author offers on this Subject. He argues, "If I don't un- "derſtand the Terms of a Propoſition, or if "they are inconſiſtent with one another, or "ſo uncertain, that I know not what Meaning

"to

" to fix on them, here is nothing told me, and " consequently no room for Belief.

The Author here takes it for granted, that in Propositions concerning Things above our Reason, the Terms of the Proposition are absolutely unintelligible. But this is not true. Tho' the Things themselves may have something in them above my Reach, and which I am not able distinctly to explain, and be attended with Difficulties that I cannot solve, yet there may be a sufficient Reason to affirm or deny something concerning them; and I may understand in that Case what I affirm or deny, and why I do so; or in other Words, I may have a sufficient Understanding of the Terms of a Proposition to make my Assent to it reasonable, though the Thing intended by those Terms be a Thing of which I have not a clear and adequate Idea. Thus, *e. g.* that God is eternal is an intelligible Proposition, though the Manner and Nature of this Eternity I am not able to explain; that God has created the World, that he is every where present, that he fore-knows future Contingencies; the Propositions here relate to Things above our Capacity to explain or account for, but yet the Propositions themselves are intelligible, and we cannot be said in these Cases to believe we know not what; for we know and are certain for very good Reasons of the Reality of those Things which we affirm and believe, though if call'd to explain the Manner how these Things are so, we are not able to give a consistent Account or Explication

of

of them. What I believe in all theſe Caſes I know by ſufficient Evidence or Argument, which makes that Belief a reaſonable Aſſent, and my not being able to explain the Manner of them, which is a Thing I do not know, is no Reaſon for my not believing the Reality of them, which is a Thing I do know. Thus to keep to the Inſtances already alledg'd, my not being able to explain what Eternity is, is no Reaſon for my not believing that God is eternal, which is a Thing of which I have the ſtrongeſt Evidence; my not being able to explain how he is every where preſent, is no Proof that therefore he is not omnipreſent; and my not being able to explain how he does fore-know future Contingencies, is no Proof that he does not fore-know them; and my not being able to account how this is reconcilable with Man's Free-agency, is no Proof that therefore theſe Things cannot be reconcil'd, nor therefore any ſufficient Objection againſt my believing that they are very conſiſtent. In theſe Caſes I have ſufficient Ground to proceed upon, in affirming what I do affirm concerning them; and my not being able to comprehend or explain the Manner how they can be ſo, or to anſwer all the Difficulties that may be objected againſt them, is to be reſolv'd into the Sublimity of the Subject, and the Narrowneſs of my own Underſtanding.

When therefore this Author alledges, that it "is impoſſible to believe when we know not "what it is we are to believe, or to believe "an

" an abſurd and contradictory Propoſition; I eaſily grant the latter, if he means one that is really contradictory, and appears to us to be ſo; 'tis impoſſible to believe it whilſt we think it ſo; but it may be our Fault, that we think that to be abſurd which is not ſo; this may be owing to our raſh and haſty judging of Things above our Reach, and of which we are incompetent Judges.

So this Author ſeems to think it abſolutely inconſiſtent with God's univerſal Goodneſs to do more for ſome of the human Race, and give 'em greater Means and Advantages for Improvement, *&c.* than others; and yet in this he is certainly miſtaken, becauſe (as I ſhall have Occaſion to ſhew afterwards) 'tis evident in Fact that God does make ſuch a Diſtinction, whether we ſuppoſe a Revelation or not. And it is evident alſo as any firſt Principle, that God can do nothing but what is juſt and good; and that therefore the making ſuch a Diſtinction is very conſiſtent with his univerſal Goodneſs; and I am oblig'd for that Reaſon to believe it ſo; and that all the Difficulty is owing to the Narrowneſs of my own Underſtanding, and the Difficulty wou'd vaniſh if I had as comprehenſive a View of Things as God has. This may be call'd if he pleaſes, a ſubmitting our Reaſon or Underſtanding to God, which in other words is no more than to believe that God is wiſer than I am, and may have Reaſons for Things which I don't at preſent ſee, and for want of ſeeing may think abſurd; in which Caſe it is my

Duty

Duty to get over the ſeeming Abſurdity, and to conquer my Prejudices; and not to do ſo is a great Fault.

If this Author by ſaying, that *it is impoſſible to believe, when we know not what it is we are to believe,* means that we can't believe a Thing to be true, except we can diſtinctly know and account for the Manner how it is ſo, and anſwer all the Difficulties relating to it; *e. g.* that we can't believe that God's Ways in the mention'd Inſtance are juſt, except we can diſtinctly know and explain the Reaſons upon which he proceeds; or that we can't believe that God is eternal, immenſe, and that he knows all Things, except we can diſtinctly explain what Eternity and Immenſity is, and how it is that he knows all Things, it is plainly falſe; but if he only means, that we cannot believe a Thing to be true, except we know or have good Reaſon to aſſure us that it is true, I own it. Thus in the Inſtance mention'd above, I believe that God's Procedure is wiſe and juſt, becauſe I know it to be ſo; and I know it to be ſo upon this Ground, or by this Medium, that a Being of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs can do or permit nothing but what it is wiſe and juſt in him to do or to permit, which is a ſelf-evident Propoſition. And my Ignorance of the particular Reaſons of this Procedure, and my not being able to account for it, is no Argument for my not believing it to be wiſe and juſt, when I have otherwiſe ſufficient Evidence of its being ſo.

" In

"In all Cases (says this Author) where I "am capable of understanding a Proposition, "'tis Reason must inform me, whether it be "certain, probable, or uncertain." This will be easily granted. Even with relation to Things above Reason, or which transcend our Comprehension, we are to believe no further than we have Evidence, either from the Nature of the Thing, or from sufficient Testimony. And Reason must judge whether the Evidence be sufficient, or in other words, whether we have sufficient Grounds for believing. I add, that Reason may inform me, even in Things which taken in their just Extent are above my Comprehension, and which I am not able distinctly to explain, that some Propositions relating to them are true, and therefore to be believed, as in several of the Instances already mention'd; and that the contrary Propositions are false.

Thus it appears, that there are Things above our Reason, or which exceed our Capacity in this present State, which tho' true and certain in themselves, are attended with Difficulties which we are not able to solve, though perhaps they may appear plain and easy to Beings of superior Understandings; and there are Propositions relating to such Subjects which we are oblig'd to believe. Nor does this, as the Author insinuates, *set the Ravings of an Enthusiast on a level with the Dictates of infinite Wisdom, or render Nonsense most sacred.* For we are to believe

nothing concerning those Objects that are in the Sense already explain'd above our Reason, but what we have a full Evidence for, and what we have just Grounds to believe. We proceed as much upon Evidence and reasonable Grounds of Assent, in believing Propositions relating to such Subjects, as in believing any Proposition whatsoever. And this Evidence or Ground of believing must either arise from the Reason of the Thing, or from competent Authority. And in the latter Case we must have reasonable Grounds to believe that the Authority is sufficient, and safely to be depended on. So that here is a sufficient Security against being impos'd upon either by Enthusiasts or Impostors.

I think it naturally follows from what has been now offer'd, that supposing a Revelation from God well attested, and confirm'd by such Proofs and Evidences as can reasonably be desir'd in such a Case, it is no sufficient Objection against it, that it contains some Doctrines relating to Things which exceed our Comprehension, and which we are not able distinctly to explain or to account for. And those certainly have very narrow Views, who whilst they pretend a great Zeal for natural Religion, make it an insuperable Objection against Revelation, that it teaches some Doctrines concerning Things, the Manner of which we find it hard to conceive. For this, if it prov'd any thing, wou'd prove that natural Religion is to be rejected too;

since

since this also teaches Doctrines concerning Things above our Reason or Comprehension, and has its Mysteries too. Indeed on every Supposition, and whatever Scheme of Religion we chuse, we must still admit some Doctrines or Principles that are attended with Difficulties which we are not able to solve.

I might easily instance in many Things relating to natural Philosophy, where as all know that are not utter Strangers to those Studies, we are oblig'd to admit many Things as true, which we cannot undertake to explain, and which are incumber'd with Difficulties which we know not how to solve. But I have chosen to confine my self to Instances where Religion is concern'd. And since if there be a Revelation at all, it must be suppos'd that we shou'd have some Things there discover'd to us, concerning the Nature and Attributes of God and the Councils of his Will, which we cou'd not otherwise have known at all, or not so certainly, so it may justly be expected, that in such a Revelation there may be some Things which we find it very difficult to explain or to account for; which is not owing to any Defect in the Revelation, but to the Nature of the Subject, of which we have no clear and adequate Ideas. And I cannot but think those Gentlemen very unreasonable, who if a Revelation contains nothing but what is clear and obvious and easily comprehended, take occasion to represent it as perfectly useless and needless, and

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that it tells us nothing but what we knew, or might as eaſily have known before; and if the Revelation contains any Doctrines which are of a ſublime and myſterious Nature, and therefore are attended with conſiderable Difficulties, ariſing from the Sublimity of the Subject and the Narrowneſs of our own Underſtanding, make this an inſuperable Objection againſt receiving it.

The End of the Firſt PART.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM